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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Court orders FIR against Buch for stock mkt 'fraud'

Court will monitor probe and has sought report within 30 days

MUMBAI, 2 MARCH

A special court in Mumbai has directed the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) to register an FIR against former Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch, along with five other officials, in connection with an alleged stock market fraud and regulatory violations.

Judge Shashikant Eknathrao Bangar, in an order passed on Saturday, stated that there is prima facie evidence of regulatory lapses and collusion, which necessitates a fair and impartial probe. The court also noted that the allegations point to a cognisable offence, emphasising the need for judicial intervention after inaction from law enforcement agencies and SEBI itself.

The individuals named in the order include SEBI's former chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch, BSE Managing Director and CEO Sundararaman Ramamurthy, BSE's former chairman Pramod Agarwal, and SEBI whole-time members Ashwani Bhatia, Ananth Narayan G, and Kamlesh Chandra Varshney. The court has instructed the ACB to initiate an investigation and submit a status report within 30 days.

Madhabi Puri Buch **PHOTO: ANI**

The complainant, Sapan Shrivastava, a media reporter, sought an investigation into the alleged offences involving large-scale financial fraud, regulatory violations, and corruption. The allegations centre on the fraudulent listing of a company on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) with the active connivance of regulatory authorities, particularly SEBI, without complying with the provisions of the SEBI Act, 1992, and related regulations.

- Hindenburg accused Buch and her husband, Dhaval Buch, of having offshore investments linked to Adani Group, which was involved in stock manipulation.

Shrivastava claimed that SEBI officials failed in their statutory duties, enabling market manipulation and corporate fraud by permitting the listing of a company that did not meet the prescribed norms. Despite repeated attempts to approach the police and regulatory bodies, no action was taken, the complainant asserted. In response to the court order, SEBI stated that it would challenge the ruling. The regulator acknowledged the filing of a Miscellaneous Application before the ACB court, which sought directions for the police to investigate irregularities regarding the listing of a company in 1994. SEBI emphasised that the officials named in the case were not holding their positions at the relevant time, and the court allowed the application without issuing notices or allowing SEBI to present its side. SEBI also criticised the complainant, labelling him as a "frivolous and habitual litigant."

Madhabi Puri Buch, India's first female SEBI chairperson, completed her three-year tenure on Friday. Buch had faced significant scrutiny during her term, including conflict-of-interest allegations by US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research. Hindenburg accused Buch and her husband, Dhaval Buch, of having offshore investments linked to the Adani Group, which were allegedly involved in stock manipulation. Buch has denied the allegations, asserting that the investments were made before her appointment and that she had complied with all disclosure requirements. *—PTI*

TO UPDATE SYSTEM

Duplicate voter ID not indicative of fake voters: EC

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Amid reports flagging issuance of identical voter card numbers to electors in two different states, the Election Commission on Sunday said it will rectify the issue and also update its technology-driven platform.

The poll authority also asserted that duplicate numbers do not necessarily imply fake voters.

It said while the elector photo identity card (EPIC) numbers of some of the voters "may be identical", the other details, including demographic details, assembly constituency and polling booth, are different.

"Irrespective of the EPIC number, any elector can cast a vote only at their designated polling station in their respective constituency in their state or Union territory where they are enrolled in the electoral roll and nowhere else," the poll panel said.

It explained that identical EPIC numbers or series were allotted to some electors from different states and Union territories due to a "decentralised and manual mechanism" being followed prior to shifting of the electoral roll database of all states to the ERONET (Electoral Roll Management) platform.

This resulted in certain state chief electoral officers using the same EPIC alpha-numeric series and leaving a scope for the possibility of duplicate EPIC numbers being allotted to electors in different assembly constituencies in different states, the poll body said.

According to the EC website, ERONET helps election officials maintain the electoral system "by removing duplicate entries and inclusion of migrated electors". The ERONET 2.0 platform will be updated to aid and assist in this process, it said. *—PTI*

Kerala man shot dead on Jordan, Israel border

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, 2 MARCH

Ani Thomas Gabriel, a 47-year-old man from Kerala, was reportedly shot dead at the Jordan-Israel border, according to his family. They received an email from the Indian Embassy in Jordan on March 1 confirming his death. The incident occurred on February 10 when Jordanian soldiers opened fire as Gabriel and three others attempted to cross the border into Israel. Gabriel was said to have been shot in the head, while relative Edison was injured in the leg but survived and returned home. Gabriel had left for Jordan on 5 February under the pretext of visiting a pilgrimage in Velankanni. His family remained unaware of his true intentions until Edison returned and further inquiries were made through the Embassy. Gabriel is survived by his wife, Christeena. *—PTI*

Hindu grp seeks ban on Muslims in Holi celebrations

MATHURA, 2 MARCH

The Dharam Raksha Sangh, a Hindu nationalist organisation based in Vrindavan, has expressed distrust towards the Muslim community and called for restrictions on their participation in Holi celebrations. National president Saurabh Gaur accused Muslims of threatening Hindus in recent incidents in Bareilly and announced a ban on their entry to major pilgrimage sites during Holi. Gaur asserted that Holi is a festival of love and harmony for Hindus and suggested that Muslims should only be allowed if they provide a written assurance to Hindus. In contrast, Tanveer Ahmed, secretary of the Shahi Idgah Intazamia Committee, dismissed these remarks as divisive, emphasising that Holi has historically been celebrated in Braj with harmony and peace among all communities. *—PTI*

UK, France join hands to end Ukraine war

LONDON, 2 MARCH

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer says Britain, France and Ukraine have agreed to work on a ceasefire plan to present to the United States. Starmer says the plan emerged after talks among the four countries' leaders following Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Oval Office blowout with US President Donald Trump. The Prime Minister told the BBC he believes the US president wants a durable peace in Ukraine. He repeated his assertion that American security guarantees will be needed to make it stick. *—PTI*

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K'taka Assembly session set to be begin today

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

The first session of the Karnataka legislature in 2025, beginning on Monday, is expected to be contentious, with both the ruling Congress and opposition BJP facing internal divisions. The 15-day session will begin with Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot's address to the joint sitting of the legislature at Vidhana Soudha.

The ruling Congress, is expected to target the Opposition, especially the BJP, on the alleged injustice to Karnataka by the Centre in -- devolution of taxes, proposed delimitation exercise arguing that the it would unfairly impact southern states, delay in clearances several development and irrigation projects in the state.

Also, likely to figure among other issues is law and order situation, in the wake of incidents of crime, tension in Mysuru's Udayagiri and police's subsequent handling, alleged assault on a state-run bus conductor for not speaking Marathi in Belagavi. The government may also table the Karnataka Micro Loan and Small Loan (Prevention of Coercive Actions) Bill, 2025, replacing ordinance. *—PTI*

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Hundreds of visitors flocked to Benglauru's Vidhana Soudha to attend first-ever book fair held in the premises. Karnataka State Legislature Book Fair was inaugrated on 28 February and will continue till 3 March **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

'NO ONE IS SAFE'

Jalgaon: Union Minister's daughter molested at fair

JALGAON, 2 MAR

Union Minister Raksha Khadse has filed a police complaint concerning the harassment including molestation of her daughter and her friends by a group of men during an event in Jalgaon, Maharashtra.

Following her complaint, one individual, identified as Soham Mali, has been arrested, while six others remain at large.

The FIR was lodged at Muktainagar police station regarding the incident that occurred during the Sant Muktai Yatra in Kothali village on Friday night. The accused are charged with stalking and offences under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, as well as provisions of the Information Technology Act for attempting to photograph the girls without consent.

Khadse stated that while in Gujarat, her daughter called for permission to attend the event, at which point she advised her to take security personnel with her. Upon arriving home, Khadse learned that her daughter had faced harassment both at the recent event and again on 24 February. Khadse - who belongs to the BJP, that's in power in Maharashtra - raised a concern over the safety of the common people when even ministers' families are not safe. She asked, "If my own daughter is not safe, what will be the condition of others? I will demand strict action from the state government for the implementation of the law." Critics, including Maharashtra Congress chief Harshvardhan Sapkal, condemned the deteriorating law and order situation, emphasising the increased dangers faced by women in the state. *—PTI*

Raksha Khadse **PHOTO: XXX**

Rescue called off; 8 dead in U'khand avalanche

DEHRADUN, 2 MARCH

The bodies of the last four of the trapped labourers were pulled out from the site of the avalanche-hit Border Roads Organisation (BRO) camp in Chamoli on Sunday, taking the death toll to eight as authorities ended the nearly 60-hour rescue operation.

Army doctors said 46 workers who were rescued on Saturday have been brought to the military hospital in Jyotirmath. Two of them have been referred to AIIMS, Rishikesh. Three of the workers are in critical condition, Lt Col DS Maldhya said.

The body of the last missing worker has also been retrieved. The recovery marks the culmination of the Mana Village Rescue operation, Defence Public Relations Officer (PRO) Lt Col Manish Shrivastava said.

Four bodies were retrieved on Saturday and as many on Sunday. *—PTI*

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TO FACE AUS IN SEMIS

Shreyas 50, Varun's fifer help India beat NZ

DUBAI, 2 MARCH

Shreyas Iyer's composed 79 and Varun Chakravarthy's brilliant 5-wicket haul helped India secure a 44-run victory over New Zealand in their final group-stage match at the Champions Trophy. India finished at the top of Group A, setting up a semifinal clash against Australia.

India now face Australia in the first semifinal on Tuesday, while New Zealand will take on South Africa in the other semifinal.

India's innings was built around Iyer's steady knock of 79 off 98 balls, which helped India recover from a top-order collapse. The team was struggling at 30/3, with captain Rohit Sharma, Shubman Gill, and Virat Kohli all getting out cheaply. Shreyas Iyer and Axar Patel joined forces to stitch a fine partnership after early setbacks. At the end of 10 overs, India was 37/3, with Iyer (5*) and Axar (3*) unbeaten.

Indian players celebrate after winning the ICC Champions Trophy cricket match over New Zealand, in Dubai, UAE, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

However, Iyer, along with Axar Patel (42 off 61), steadied the innings with a 98-run partnership. Hardik Pandya later provided a late flourish with a quick 45 off 45 balls, guiding India to 249/9.

In response, New Zealand began their chase with a gritty 81 from Kane Williamson, but their batting unit struggled against India's spin attack. Chakravarthy (5/42) was the star, relentlessly targeting the stumps. Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja, and Axar Patel also bowled with precision, reducing New Zealand to 205 all out in 45.3 overs.

Chakravarthy was adjudged Player of the Match after returning with match-winning figures of 5/42 in his 10 overs. 'Chinaman' spinner Kuldeep Yadav chipped in with 2/56 in 9.3 overs. Hardik Pandya, Axar Patel and Jadeja contributed with a wicket each. *—PTI*

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Palestinians sit at a table surrounded by the rubble of destroyed homes as they gather for iftar in the Gaza Strip **PHOTO: PTI**

ISRAEL CUTS OFF AID TO GAZA AS RAMADAN BEGINS

TEL AVIV, 2 MARCH

Israel has halted all goods and supplies entering Gaza as Ramadan begins, warning of further consequences unless Hamas agrees to a new proposal extending a fragile ceasefire. The ceasefire, which began in January, expired on Saturday, and while both sides have not formally ended it, negotiations on the second phase are stalled. Egypt condemned the move, accusing Israel of using "starvation as a weapon". *—PTI*

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PHOTO: ANI

Govt vehicle driver assaulted by sand miners in Koppal

KOPPAL, 2 MARCH

A gang of illegal sand miners assaulted a government vehicle driver during a raid in the Koppal district on Friday. The driver, Sachin Gouripura, was injured when an eight-member group attacked him while he was part of a team attempting to stop illegal sand-mining activities in Chikkasandogi village. Rashid, a senior scientist with the Mining and Geology Department, reported the incident to the Alavandi police. The raid had targeted a tractor illegally transporting sand from the Hirehall River in Koppal taluk. After stopping the vehicle and instructing the driver to unload the sand, the gang assaulted Gouripura, leaving him badly beaten. He was later admitted to Koppal District Hospital. Local villagers, speaking anonymously, claimed that illegal sand mining has been ongoing, with heavy vehicles damaging roads leading to the river. They also alleged that the operation continues with the support of influential figures, including politicians, who may have vested interests in the illegal trade. Alavandi Police Inspector Prakash Naik confirmed the attack but noted that the officials conducting the raid had neither informed nor sought police assistance before the operation. The police have recovered equipment used for illegal sand lifting, but the attackers managed to flee the scene. *—Salar News*

Humnabad councillor's caste certificate cancelled

BIDAR, 2 MAR

The District Collector's Court has ordered the cancellation of the municipal council membership of Reshma Ganda Sridhara following an investigation into the authenticity of her caste certificate. Elected in the 2019 municipal elections for Ward No. 1 in Humnabad, Reshma was found to have obtained a false caste certificate. The application for cancellation was filed by Shivputra Malage Indiranagar, a JDS leader, citing violations under Section 41(1) of the Karnataka Municipal Councils Act 1964. During the hearing, evidence presented revealed that Reshma's father, Chandrakanta, had secured the caste certificate through dubious means and had received financial incentives from the Social Welfare Department for an inter-caste marriage. The court determined that the husband's caste does not transfer to the wife after marriage, reinforcing the ruling that Reshma's caste certificate was invalid. As a result, the court has annulled her membership in the Humanabad Municipal Council, holding firm on the guidelines set by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Amendment Rules of 1993. *—Salar News*

K'taka Assembly session begins

Session to be turbulent with Congress & BJP facing internal divisions

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

The first session of the Karnataka legislature in 2025, beginning on Monday, is expected to be contentious, with both the ruling Congress and opposition BJP facing internal divisions. The 15-day session will begin with Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot's address to the joint sitting of the legislature at Vidhana Soudha. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will also present his 16th budget on 7 March, with the 2025-26 budget expected to total Rs 4 lakh crore, up from Rs 3.71 lakh crore for the current fiscal.

The session comes amid ongoing speculation about leadership changes within the Congress, with discussions surrounding a potential "rotational chief minister" formula. While Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar is a key contender for the post, supporters of Siddaramaiah assert that he will continue in office. The opposition BJP is also grappling with internal divisions, particularly over the leadership of state unit President BY Vijayendra. Despite these rifts, the BJP, along with its JD(S) ally, is expected to unite in opposing the government on several issues.

Visitors arrive for the Karnataka State Legislature Book Fair at Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Price hikes, including recent increases in bus fares for the state-run road transport corporation and Bengaluru Metro, as well as proposed hikes in milk prices and water tariffs, are set to be major points of contention. The opposition will also target the government over its tax burden, particularly due to the implementation of five guarantee schemes, and accusations of misallocating funds under the Scheduled Caste and Tribal Sub-Plans.

Other topics likely to arise include the Karnataka Lokayukta's clean chit to Siddaramaiah and his wife over the MUDA site allotment scam, and law and order concerns following incidents in Mysuru and Belagavi.

> Price hikes, including bus and Bengaluru Metro fares, as well as proposed hikes in milk prices and water tariffs, are set to be major points of contention.

Key bills expected to be tabled include the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, aimed at dividing the BBMP into multiple corporations, and the Karnataka Micro Loan and Small Loan Bill, which seeks to protect borrowers from harassment by microfinance institutions. The delayed release of the 'caste census' report is also likely to spark debate. *—PTI*

BBMP issues tax notices to Vidhana Soudha

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has issued notices to Vidhana Soudha and Raj Bhavan, along with 258 other government establishments, demanding payment of long-pending property tax dues. These state-owned properties owe several crores in unpaid taxes, some of which have been pending for as long as 17 years.

BBMP officials confirmed that key government buildings, including Vikasa Soudha, are among the defaulters. East Zone Commissioner Snehal stated that notices were sent under the One-Time Settlement (OTS) scheme, with follow-up reminders to ensure compliance. However, she could not confirm the total outstanding dues, although reports suggest they could amount to around Rs 182 crore.

The BBMP's efforts to recover these pending taxes come at a time when the civic body is facing a significant financial crunch, with mounting dues affecting its ability to fund essential civic projects and services in the City. *—Salar News*

My loyalty to Cong is unquestionable: DKS

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has asserted his unwavering loyalty to the Congress party, dismissing any doubts about his dedication as mere illusions. In response to recent speculation regarding changes in the Chief Minister position and his meetings with central party leaders in Delhi, Shivakumar emphasised that he remains committed to his role as a party worker, stating, "I have not put any condition on anyone... Putting conditions or blackmailing is not in my blood."

DK Shivakumar **PHOTO: ANI**

Shivakumar, who also serves as the state Congress chief, spoke confidently about the party's prospects, predicting a return to power in the 2028 Assembly elections. He refrained from confirming any details about a purported "rotational chief minister" agreement, pointing to the future as the time for such discussions.

> In a separate meeting with businessman Mohandas Pai, Shivakumar discussed developmental issues facing Bengaluru, promising significant progress within six months.

Amid criticism for attending Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev's Mahashivaratri event, Shivakumar described his participation as a personal belief, highlighting the need for inclusivity within society. He stated, "I believe in all religions, all castes." Some Congress leaders have expressed unease regarding his associations, but Shivakumar maintained that such matters should not divide the party.

In a separate meeting with businessman Mohandas Pai, Shivakumar discussed developmental issues facing Bengaluru, promising significant progress within six months. The meeting underscored the city's status as a global tech hub, with Pai expressing confidence in collaborative efforts to address urban challenges. *—ANI*

Submit report on use of plastic in idlis, FSSAI asks

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has directed Karnataka to submit a report on the use of plastic sheets for steaming idlis in some restaurants. This follows growing concerns over the potential health risks posed by the practice, including the leaching of harmful chemicals from plastic into food.

FSSAI CEO G Kamala Vardhana Rao emphasised that using non-food-grade plastics, particularly under high temperatures, can release toxic substances like bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates, which may pose serious health risks.

The move comes shortly after the Karnataka Health Department banned the use of plastic in idli preparation across hotels and restaurants. This decision followed an investigation in which food inspectors tested 251 idli samples, 51 of which were found to be contaminated.

FSSAI has instructed the Karnataka State Food Safety Department to take immediate action against any violators, ensuring that only food-grade materials are used in food preparation. *—ANI*

SWEET SUMMER RELIEF

A HOPCOMS store in Bengaluru is seen filled with watermelons. With the arrival of summer, the demand for refreshing, hydrating fruits has surged across the City. Watermelons, known for their high water content and cooling properties, are a popular choice to beat the heat **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Mysuru college introduces midday meals for girl students

MYSURU, 2 MAR

Government First Grade College in Kuvempu Nagar has announced the launch of a midday meal programme for its girl students, starting this Sunday. This initiative is made possible through generous donations from philanthropists and a partnership with Akshaya Patra of ISKCON, initially benefiting 80 selected students.

During the launch event, MLAs TS Srivatsa, who also serves as the chairman of the college's development council, highlighted that the decision to implement this scheme aims to encourage more girls, especially from rural backgrounds, to pursue their education at the government-run institution.

PHOTO: ANI

Given the current classroom shortages, the college has been conducting classes in batches from 8am, requiring many students to leave their homes by 6 am. The management discovered that many girls were attending college without having breakfast, prompting the need for this vital support.

In addition to the midday meals, Srivatsa expressed his commitment to advocate for the establishment of an Indira canteen in the vicinity of the college to further assist students and the less fortunate. He also urged the state government to extend the midday meal programme to postgraduate and degree students, as it currently applies only to those in grades 1 through 10. He plans to raise this issue in the upcoming budget session to capture the attention of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. *—Salar News*

Mystery surrounds death of techie found in car

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

A 42-year-old private firm employee was found dead under mysterious circumstances inside his car on Thindlu Main Road late on Saturday night. The deceased, Ashwin Kumar, from Gokul Layout, Mathikere, was found unresponsive in his vehicle near Kodigehalli police station.

According to the police, Ashwin had left home in his car on Saturday evening. When he failed to return by late night, his family grew concerned and tried calling him repeatedly,

PHOTO: ANI

but his phone went unanswered. They subsequently alerted the police, who began tracing his phone's location.

By around 11.30pm, the police located Ashwin's vehicle parked near a flyover on Thindlu Main Road. Officers found him slumped in the driver's seat, unresponsive. Despite attempts to rouse him, including tapping on the car windows, there was no response. The police broke the car window and discovered Ashwin was dead.

Preliminary findings revealed that the car's windows were rolled up and the air conditioning was switched on. The vehicle had run out of fuel, causing it to stall. While authorities are considering suffocation due to lack of ventilation or a possible cardiac arrest, family members have expressed suspicions regarding the circumstances of his death.

> Preliminary findings revealed that the car's windows were rolled up and the air conditioning was switched on.

A similar incident occurred within the HAL police station limits on 20 February, where a 37-year-old techie, Santosh Prasad, was found dead in his car, having suffered a cardiac arrest. *—Salar News*

A senior police official noted the difficulty in tracking stolen phones, particularly with the rise of inter-state mobile theft networks **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

Phone theft victims feel hesitant to approach cops

BENGALURU, 2 MARCH

Mobile phone thefts continue to be a major concern in Bengaluru, with a worrying trend emerging where victims are increasingly reluctant to report incidents to the police. Despite heightened vigilance, many feel the complaint process is frustrating, with little hope of recovering their stolen devices.

In a recent case, Praveen Kumar, a student from Andhra Pradesh, lost his phone to bike-borne thieves on the night of 28 February. The incident occurred around 11pm on 19th Main Road, Jayanagar, when two miscreants snatched his phone and fled before he could react. Though Praveen filed a complaint with the police, the chances of recovery remain uncertain. Investigators are now reviewing CCTV footage to identify the suspects.

On the same night, a cab driver in Puttenahalli also had his phone stolen by two bikers. However, unlike Praveen, the driver chose not to report the theft, fearing the process would be overly complicated and ultimately pointless.

This reluctance to approach the police is becoming common, say sources. Many victims believe the complaint process is time-consuming and rarely leads to the recovery of their phones. Victims are often asked to submit complaints online through the Central Equipment Identity Register (CEIR) or e-lost report portals, but updates or follow-ups are scarce.

A senior police official noted the difficulty in tracking stolen phones, particularly with the rise of inter-state mobile theft networks. One such case saw a phone tracked from Bengaluru to Punjab, only for it to change hands multiple times, making recovery nearly impossible. This growing sense of helplessness is eroding public trust in the system. *—Salar News*

SUN BEATS DOWN ON CITY

Soaring mercury drives up tender coconut prices

BENGALURU, 02 MAR

With temperatures rising significantly across Karnataka, residents are increasingly turning to refreshing beverages for relief, resulting in a surge in demand for tender coconut water. However, limited supply has led to sharp price increases, with tender coconuts now costing Rs 60 each in Bengaluru, causing concern among both consumers and vendors.

As the summer season approaches, locals are already feeling the effects of the early heat, preparing for potentially harsher weather in the coming months. Meteorological Department officials have warned that temperatures are expected to remain above average until the end of May, elevating worries about the ongoing heatwave.

Vendors attribute the price hike to erratic supplies from districts such as Mandya and Tumakuru **PHOTO: SALAR**

Construction worker Venkatesh S expressed the struggle many face: "These days, we hardly eat proper meals—just drink water and other cool drinks to stay hydrated. By 8 am, the sun becomes unbearable, and stepping outside feels impossible."

Just days ago, tender coconuts were priced around Rs 25 to Rs 30, but prices have now nearly doubled, leaving customers astounded. Sunitha, a private bank employee from Vijayanagara, noted, "Today, the same coconut costs Rs 60, and in some places, even more."

Vendors attribute the price hikes to erratic supplies from districts like Mandya and Tumakuru, compounded by last year's severe summer that weakened many coconut trees. Ramesh Gowda, a trader from Tumakuru, remarked, "Demand has far exceeded supply, which is why prices have shot up."

While urban consumers become more health-conscious and opt for natural beverages, the increased costs primarily affect consumers. Farmers receive only a small portion of the profits due to escalating transportation and middleman fees, turning tender coconut water into a luxury for many. The Meteorological Department urges residents to stay hydrated and take health precautions as temperatures remain high. *—Salar News*

SIT to probe Haryana Congress worker's murder

CHANDIGARH, 2 MARCH

Haryana Police has set up an SIT to conduct probe in the murder case of Congress worker Himani Narwal, whose body was found stuffed in a suitcase near a bus stand in the Rohtak district on Saturday. A special investigation team (SIT) has been set up and four teams of Rohtak Police are already looking for the culprits behind the incident, a police official said on Sunday. She lived at Vijay Nagar in Rohtak, police said. Former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda Sunday said he spoke to Rohtak's superintendent of police regarding the Himani murder, adding that police and the government should ensure speedy justice for the victim's family.—*PTI*

J&K Budget: Omar chairs coalition meeting

JAMMU, 2 MARCH

A day before the first budget session of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly in seven years, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah convened a joint meeting of coalition parties to ensure smooth proceedings. The meeting included Congress legislative party leader GA Mir and CPI(M) MLA MY Tarigami, following a separate session for the National Conference. Mir emphasised the importance of addressing public concerns in the upcoming budget, which he hopes will support the government's manifesto for 2025-26. He reiterated the Congress party's commitment to restoring statehood for Jammu and Kashmir, attributing delays to the BJP-led central government. Mir also commented on the PDP's forthcoming bills, stating it is up to the house to decide on such matters. —*PTI*

BJP slams Goa MLA over 'Indianisation' comment

PANAJI, 2 MARCH

The ruling BJP in Goa has responded strongly to opposition MLA Vijai Sardesai's comments on the "Indianisation" of Goa. Following a meeting with 87-year-old writer Uday Bhembre, Sardesai accused the BJP of attempting to impose its ideology, likening Goa to Uttar Pradesh, and described the situation as a new culture of oppression. He called for an open debate regarding Bhembre's views on Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, which sparked protests from Bajarang Dal activists. In response, BJP spokesperson Giriraj Pai Vernekar questioned Sardesai's integrity, condemning his silence on Bhembre's statements about the revered Maratha king. Vernekar urged politicians not to politicise Hindu faith for votes, asserting that the distortion of historical facts is intolerable. Bhembre has refused to apologise for his remarks. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

BJP govt unsparing in punishing drug traffickers: Shah

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah stated that the Modi government remains uncompromising in its fight against drug traffickers exploiting youth for monetary gain. In a post on X, Shah reaffirmed the government's commitment to building a "drug-free Bharat" through rigorous investigations. He noted that 29 traffickers have been convicted in 12 cases across India, demonstrating the effectiveness of the government's "bottom to top" and "top to bottom" strategies. Highlighted case details include seizures of charas and ganja across multiple states. He praised the Narcotics Control Bureau's achievements and emphasized a zero-tolerance policy towards drugs, aiming for a drug-free India by 2047. —*PTI*

No Oppn unity, as Congress goes solo for Assam polls

AJP, Raijor Dal leaders insisted on unity despite emotional talks

GUWAHATI, 2 MARCH

Efforts to unite non-BJP parties in Assam ahead of the 2026 assembly elections appear to be faltering, as key Congress figures suggest the possibility of the main opposition party contesting independently.

State Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah's recent Facebook post indicated a potential departure from alliance talks, while party MP Pradyut Bordoloi's abrupt exit from an all-opposition meeting on Saturday raised further questions about consensus among opposition groups. The meeting, hosted by prominent citizens at a resort in Sonapur, sought to forge unity between various parties including Congress, Left parties, Raijor Dal, and Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP).

Bordoloi, a two-time Lok Sabha MP and former state minister, left the meeting suddenly, declining to comment on his departure. Following the event, Borah refrained from sharing details of the discussions but hinted at significant differences within the party, quoting the legendary Rabindranath Tagore's couplet 'Ekla cholo re' with the tagline 'Pre-poll/post-poll'.

The 16-party opposition alliance, formed for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, had previously disbanded during bypolls ***PHOTO: X/@ASSAMCONGRESS***

The meeting's organisers, including noted writer and former DGP Harekrishna Deka, insisted that a decision was made to keep all non-BJP factions united. "There were discussions and arguments, but in the end, the consensus was to come together for a greater cause," Deka stated.

AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi echoed this sentiment, asserting that despite emotional discussions, the decision to remain united was unanimous. Raijor Dal chief Akhil Gogoi also confirmed that the meeting concluded with a collective agreement.

The 16-party opposition alliance, formed for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, had previously disbanded during bypolls for five assembly seats last year due to convoluted seat-sharing arrangements, leading to a sweeping victory for the BJP and its allies, leaving the opposition without a single seat. —*PTI*

AAP brings back Bhaben as Assam chief after 5 months

GUWAHATI, 2 MARCH

AAP on Sunday said the party has appointed its national joint secretary Bhaban Choudhury as the acting state president of the Assam unit, five months after replacing him from the post.

As the party's permanent president Manoj Dhanowar is not active due to "personal reasons", the executive committee in its meeting on Saturday unanimously chose Choudhury for the position.

Choudhury was the chief of AAP Assam prior to Dhanowar taking charge as state president in September last year.

Choudhury condemned the "increasing political violence, suppression of democratic protests and the deliberate defamation campaigns against opposition leaders and their families". He claimed that the government has failed to address critical issues like skyrocketing prices, communal remarks. —*PTI*

'NO SUCCESSOR TILL DEATH'

Mayawati removes nephew Akash from BSP posts

LUCKNOW, 2 MARCH

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati has removed her nephew, Akash Anand, from all party positions and announced that she will not name a successor until her death. This marks a significant shift from last year when Anand was reinstated after a brief suspension and was positioned as her political heir.

In a high-level meeting attended by party office-bearers from across the country, Mayawati appointed her brother Anand Kumar and Ramji Gautam as national coordinators. Holding Akash Anand's father-in-law, Ashok Siddharth, responsible for his removal, she cited factionalism and anti-party activities that allegedly divided the BSP into two factions and hindered Anand's political career.

"The party is supreme, and relations can come later," Mayawati stated, emphasising her commitment to party integrity over familial ties. She praised Anand Kumar for his dedicated service to the BSP, managing various operational aspects and caring for the party's founder, Kanshi Ram, during his illness.

Mayawati ***PHOTO: PTI***

The meeting aimed to strengthen the BSP's structure, broaden its appeal across societal segments, and address organisational shortcomings. Mayawati critiqued the central and Uttar Pradesh governments' budgets, labelling them "unrealistic" and disconnected from the realities faced by the impoverished and marginalised communities.

She reiterated the BSP's dedication to the ideals of BR Ambedkar and pledged to uplift underprivileged groups. BSP is also preparing for the birth anniversary celebrations of Kanshi Ram on 15 March, with tributes planned at memorial sites. —*PTI*

Left, liberals danger to Hindus, says Himanta

KOLKATA, 2 MARCH

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday alleged that the Left and the liberals are the biggest danger to Hindus.

Maintaining that Muslims or Christians are never a threat to the Hindus, he claimed that those weakening the Hindus are within their own society.

"I believe that the Left and the liberals are the biggest danger to the Hindus," Sarma said while addressing an award ceremony conducted by a private organisation here.

"The weakening of Hindus in West Bengal was inherited by Mamata Banerjee from the Left and the liberals," the Assam chief minister said.

Sarma said that one must remember that India's civilisation is over 5,000 years old and it did not begin with the Independence of the country in 1947. India is a "naturally secular nation" and no one needs to teach it the qualities of tolerance and brotherhood, Sarma said in his address, the video of which was shared by him on his X handle.

Himanta Biswa Sarma ***PHOTO: PTI***

"If Rahul Gandhi or Mamata Banerjee think that Hindus will cease to exist, they should know that the Hindus will always remain," he said.

"In Assam, the percentage of Hindus has gone down to 58 per cent, while in West Bengal, the percentage of the community may be around 65 per cent," Sarma claimed.

He asserted that the Hindu civilisation will continue to remain and flourish. —*PTI*

Tharoor row: RaGa says Kerala Cong leaders are united

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday asserted that the party's Kerala leaders "stand as one" and were "united" by the light of purpose ahead.

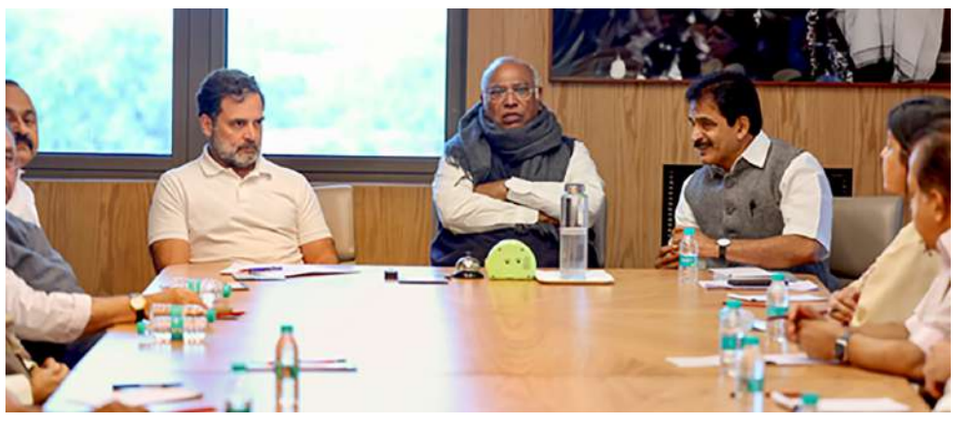
His assertion came after the Congress' top brass met Kerala leaders at 'Indira Bhawan' here for a brainstorming session on Friday to discuss the strategy and the way forward ahead of next year's assembly elections.

Posting a picture from the media byte by Kerala leaders after the meeting, Gandhi said in a Facebook post, "They stand as one, united by the light of purpose ahead."

His post was accompanied by the hashtag 'Team Kerala'.

The nearly-three-hour meeting at the Congress's Indira Bhawan headquarters here had discipline, unity and strengthening of the state organisation as its running theme.

At the meeting, Gandhi said leaders should be very careful about the political strategy and should not do or say anything that does not toe the party line, according to sources.



LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi's assertion came after the Congress' top brass met Kerala leaders at 'Indira Bhawan' in New Delhi for a brainstorming session on 28 February to discuss the strategy and the way forward ahead of next year's Assembly elections ***PHOTO: PTI***

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge had laid stress on discipline, ensuring unity and filling up the vacant posts to strengthen the party's Kerala unit.

The meeting with the senior leaders from Kerala came close on the heels of a row over Tharoor's recent article in a newspaper that drew criticism from some party leaders over the former Union minister's "praise" of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in the southern state for boosting the investment climate. Congress is the main opposition party in Kerala. —*PTI*

- At the meeting, however Gandhi said that leaders should be very careful about the political strategy and in no means should not do or say anything that does not toe the party line, according to sources

Guv Ravi blames DMK for Katchatheevu

CHENNAI, 2 MARCH

Rather than politicising the fishermen's issue and faulting the Centre for it, a constructive approach by the state government would go a long way in wiping the tears of fishers, Tamil Nadu Governor RN Ravi said on Sunday.

After meeting the protesting fishermen at Rameswaram, who sought quick release of arrested fishermen and their boats from Sri Lanka, Ravi said the fishing community was a victim of an "iniquitous agreement" of 1974 (between India and Sri Lanka), which was extremely insensitive to the livelihood concerns of the state's poor fishermen.

RN Ravi ***PHOTO: ANI***

The Governor said the ruling DMK was equally responsible for the wrong of 1974 as it held power at that time.

Law Minister S Regupathy asked Ravi to stop his "fictitious tales" about Katchatheevu and urged the governor to take up with PM Narendra Modi the matter of release of Tamil Nadu fishermen from Sri Lanka. He said the governor's allegation of the "wrong of 1974" was a rusted tool. —*PTI*

TN'S CLAIM ON NEP UNFOUNDED, POLITICAL: PRADHAN

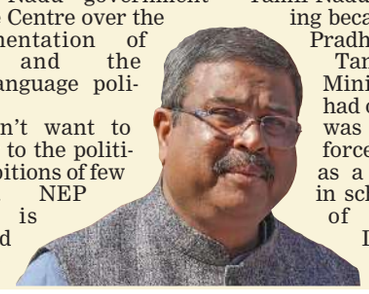
NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Sunday asserted that the New Education Policy would not impose Hindi on states and Tamil Nadu's opposition had "political reasons" behind it.

"We have never said in NEP 2020 that only Hindi will be there; we have only said that education will be based on mother tongue, in Tamil Nadu, it will be Tamil," Pradhan told reporters here.

The comments by the Education Minister come amid a tiff between the Tamil Nadu government and the Centre over the implementation of NEP and the three-language policy.

"I don't want to answer to the political ambitions of few people. NEP 2020 is focused on different languages of India, be it Hindi, Tamil, Odia, or Punjabi. All the languages have equal importance. In Tamil Nadu, few are opposing because of politics," Pradhan said.



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin had on Friday said it was unnecessary to force any language as a third language in schools in the age of Artificial Intelligence. —*PTI*

Aid for women: Delhi BJP to start registration on 8 March

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The registration process for providing Rs 2,500 per month to women from economically weaker sections by the BJP government in Delhi will begin on 8 March, party MP Manoj Tiwari said on Sunday.

In its Delhi Assembly election manifesto, BJP promised to provide Rs 2,500 per month to women from economically weaker sections under the Mahila Samriddhi Yojna, once it came to power in Delhi.

Tiwari said, "We are beginning registrations for our announce-ment of Rs 2,500 to be provided to poor women in Delhi from 8 March.

A list of beneficiaries will be prepared. The entire process of providing Rs 2,500 to every financially poor woman will be completed in one and a half months, he said, appealing to women to register for the scheme.

The opposition AAP has criticised the BJP government for not approving the scheme in its first Cabinet meeting, as promised by the Prime Minister.

Manoj Tiwari ***PHOTO: PTI***

- BJP promised to provide Rs 2,500 per month to women from economically weaker sections under the Mahila Samriddhi Yojna

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta has claimed that the previous AAP government left behind "empty coffers" for the new BJP regime, while assuring that all the promises made by the party to the people would be fulfilled.

AAP chief spokesperson Priyanka Kakkar, in a statement, reminded the BJP of its promises made to the people before coming to power.—*PTI*

AHEAD OF M'RASHTRA BUDGET

No 'cold war' in alliance, Fadnavis denies rumours of rift

MUMBAI, 2 MARCH

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday scoffed at speculations of a "cold war" between him and his deputy Eknath Shinde, and mocked Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut, quipping he wants to compete with Salim-Javed, the legendary screenwriting duo.

He was addressing a press conference with deputy CMs Shinde and Ajit Pawar after a cabinet meeting and customary tea party ahead of the four-week budget session of the assembly, which begins on Monday.

"There is no war. Those who know both of us will remember what we do when we are together," said Fadnavis, pointing to their meetings before Shinde's rebellion split the undivided Shiv Sena and sunk the Maha Vikas Aghadi government in 2022.

DyCM Shinde, who heads the Shiv Sena, said the budget session will be the first House proceedings of the new government ***PHOTO: X***

While Fadnavis maintained that all partners of ruling Mahayuti – BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP – are working unitedly, Shinde chipped in, "Everything is thanda thanda, cool cool."

Shinde, who heads the Shiv Sena, said the budget session will be the first House proceedings of the new government after Mahayuti's stunning victory in the state polls last year. —*PTI*

Karad targeted those blocking his extortion: Cops

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 2 MARCH

Walmik Karad had allegedly asked the other accused in sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh murder case to get rid of whosoever came in the way of his bid to extort money from a wind energy company, an official said on Sunday.

The official was quoting a report attached to a chargesheet filed in the sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh murder case and two related cases in which Karad, Maharashtra minister Dhananjay Munde's close aide, has been mentioned as accused no. 1. Deshmukh was threatened several times before he was abducted and killed in December last year, the official said citing the report.

Karad was arrested on 31 December, 2024 in the extortion case related to the murder of Deshmukh, the sarpanch of Massajog village in Beed district. —*PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

India's 1st World Peace Centre to open in Gurugram

GURUGRAM, 2 MARCH

A historic milestone in India's spiritual and social landscape, the first-ever World Peace Centre, established under the leadership of Jain Acharya Lokesh Muni and the efforts of Ahimsa Vishwa Bharti, will be inaugurated on March 2 at Sector 39, Gurugram. The event will be graced by Ram Nath Kovind, the former President of India, along with dignitaries including Gulab Chand Kataria, Governor of Punjab, Arif Mohammad Khan, Governor of Bihar, Nayab Singh Saini, Chief Minister of Haryana, Rekha Gupta, Chief Minister of Delhi. The World Peace Centre will play a crucial role in fostering awareness, social responsibility, and sustainable development while strengthening institutional networks for peace and harmony. *—ANI*

Sirumalai death: Deceased a driver; death accidental

DINDIGUL, 2 MARCH

The body of a man, found alongside wires and batteries at Sirumalai near here has been identified as that of a 60-year old truck driver from Kerala and his death in an explosion appeared to be accidental, police said. The man, identified as John Shabu had brought explosive materials from Kerala for farm related purposes and it is suspected that he could have died accidentally during explosion; when he tested the explosives on Thursday night. Shabu belonged to Kottayam and he is also involved in the business of taking orchards/ estates on lease. Furthermore, an autopsy performed at the Dindigul Government Medical College Hospital has indicated that Shabu could have died due to injuries sustained in the accidental explosion and the body has been handed over to Shabu's wife. *—PTI*

Brazilian woman held for swallowing 100 cocaine capsules

MUMBAI, 2 MARCH

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence has arrested a Brazilian woman who had swallowed 100 capsules of cocaine valued at Rs 10.96 crore in a bid to smuggle the drug to Mumbai, a DRI official said on Sunday. Based on specific intelligence, the DRI sleuths apprehended the woman after she arrived at Mumbai international airport from Sao Paulo, a release said without specifying the date. On questioning, she admitted to have ingested capsules containing drugs for smuggling into India, the official said. The woman was subsequently admitted to a government hospital where she purged 100 capsules containing 1,096 grams of cocaine, valued at Rs 10.96 crore in illicit market, he said. *—PTI*

Man held for duping people on pretext of recruitment in Army

PUNE, 2 MARCH

A coordinated effort by the Military Intelligence (MI) unit of the Army's Southern Command and Pune city Police has resulted in the arrest of an individual implicated in a fraudulent Army recruitment scheme, officials said. The suspect, identified as Suryawanshi Nitin Balaji from Latur district, was apprehended in the vicinity of the Southern Command headquarters in Pune on Saturday, said a senior official of Pune Police. According to police authorities, Suryawanshi targeted prospective candidates from economically weaker backgrounds in Maharashtra and Karnataka, promising them recruitment into the Army. It is alleged that he demanded Rs three lakh per candidate, fraudulently amassing an estimated sum of Rs 5-10 lakh. *—ANI*

Ganga River water unfit for bathing in Bihar: Eco Survey

Ganga water shows high bacteriological population presence

PATNA, 2 MARCH

The water of the Ganga river in Bihar is not fit for bathing at most places in the state due to the presence of a higher value of "bacteriological population", according to the Bihar Economic Survey 2024-25.

The Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) monitors the water quality of the Ganga at 34 locations in the state on a fortnightly basis, officials said.

According to the Economic Survey recently tabled in the state assembly, "The water quality of Ganga indicates the presence of a higher value of bacteriological population (total coliform and faecal coliform). This is mainly due to the discharge of sewage/domestic waste water from cities located on the banks of Ganga and her tributaries."

The Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) monitors the water quality of the Ganga at 34 locations PHOTO: ANI

The survey cited the latest water quality test results of the BSPCB.

"The other parameters... pH (acidity or basicity), dissolved oxygen and bio-chemical oxygen demand (BOD) have been observed within the prescribed limit in the river and her tributaries in Bihar, indicating that water is fit for aquatic life, wildlife propagation, fisheries and irrigation," it said.

Important towns located on the banks of the river include Buxar, Chapra (Saran), Dighwara, Sonepur, Maner, Danapur, Patna, Fatuha, Bakhtiyarpur, Barh, Mokama, Begusarai, Khagaria, Lakhisarai, Manihari, Munger, Jamalpur, Sultanganj, Bhagalpur and Kahalgaon.

As per the latest data of the BSPCB related to the quality of the Ganga accessed by PTI, the level of faecal coliform measured at Kachchi Dargah-Bidupur Bridge was 3,500 MPN/100 ml, Gulabi Ghat (5,400 MPN/100 ml), Triveni Ghat (5,400 MPN/100 ml), Gaighat (3,500 MPN/100 ml), Kewala Ghat (5,400 MPN/100 ml), Gandhi Ghat, NIT (3,500 MPN/100 ml) and Hathidah (5,400 MPN/100 ml). *—PTI*

8 DEAD; RESCUE OPS END

Bodies of 4 more workers recovered from avalanche site

DEHRADUN, 2 MARCH

The bodies of the last four of the trapped labourers were pulled out from the site of the avalanche-hit Border Roads Organisation (BRO) camp in Chamoli on Sunday, taking the death toll to eight as authorities ended the nearly 60-hour rescue operation.

Army doctors said 46 workers who were earlier rescued have been brought to the military hospital in Jyotirmath while one with a spinal cord injury was airlifted to AIIMS, Rishikesh. Three of the workers are in critical condition, Lt Col DS Maldhya said.

Helicopters, sniffer dogs and thermal imaging technology were being used to expedite the rescue operation due to apprehensions about possible inclement weather on Monday, officials said.

Three bodies of the missing labourers were found on Sunday, district administration officials said in Gopeshwar. With this, the number of workers who lost their lives in the Mana avalanche has mounted to seven. One person is still missing for whom the search is in progress, they said.

The avalanche hit the BRO camp between Mana and Badrinath on Friday, burying 54 workers inside eight containers and a shed. Earlier, it was believed that the total number of trapped labourers was 55 but one of them was on unauthorised leave and had reached home safely.

By Saturday evening, 50 workers trapped under the snow were pulled out and four of them had died.

More than 200 personnel from the disaster management authority are engaged in the operations, he said. *—PTI*

Silt removal efforts intensify at SLBC after tunnel collapse

NAGARKURNOOL, 2 MARCH

Efforts to extricate eight individuals trapped in the partially collapsed Srisailam Left Bank Canal (SLBC) tunnel have intensified, with additional personnel and machinery deployed to the site. The damaged conveyor belt at the location, crucial for removing muck and debris, is expected to be repaired by Monday, officials confirmed on Sunday.

As part of the ongoing rescue operation, silt removal and dewatering processes are being carried out continuously. A significant breakthrough occurred on Saturday when the whereabouts of four of the trapped individuals were identified, thanks to Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) used by scientists from the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI). This discovery has provided a crucial lead in the rescue efforts.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy is scheduled to visit the site on Sunday evening to meet with officials and assess the rescue operations. State Excise Minister Jupally Krishna Rao reported that the remaining four individuals are believed to be trapped beneath the tunnel boring machine, indicating that their rescue may take additional time.

Rescue operation underway to trace workers trapped inside the partially collapsed Telangana's Srisailam Left Bank Canal tunnel, Telangana, PHOTO: PTI

In response to a query about the condition of the four individuals whose locations have been identified, the minister cautioned that the chances of survival were slim. The state Disaster Management department has mobilised 18 organisations, 54 officials, and 703 personnel to support the rescue efforts, which have been ongoing since 22 February. The trapped individuals include engineers and labourers from various states including Uttar Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, and Jharkhand. *—PTI*

SFI calls for strike today in WB, demands resignation

KOLKATA, 2 MARCH

CPI(M)'s student wing SFI on Sunday called for a strike in universities and colleges across West Bengal on 3 March to demand the resignation of Education minister Bratya Basu "holding him responsible" for the injury caused to two protestors when his convoy was leaving Jadavpur university campus after students gheraoed him demanding immediate announcement of campus elections.

Students Federation of India (SFI) state committee member Shuvajit Sarkar told PTI on Sunday the strike call has been given in university and college campuses in protest against the "entry of outsiders sheltered by TMC who instigated the violence and vandalism in the Jadavpur university campus on 1 March."

The SFI, however, will extend its help for the smooth conduct of the higher secondary examination, which is slated to begin from 3 March, and organise camps near examination centres to help the candidates, he said.

The SFI also took out rallies in the city and elsewhere in the state on Sunday in protest against the "injury to left student protesters by the car of the Education minister who did not bother to listen to the students and brought outsiders inside the campus."

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Trouble broke out when Basu went to the JU campus on Saturday to attend the annual general meeting of WBCUPA.

Basu, who tried speaking to the agitating students and received memorandum from one group, was gheraoed by a large number of protesters and his security personnel had a trying time to escort him to his vehicle. *—PTI*

BUS SERVICE LAUNCHED IN NAXAL-HIT PAMED

BIJAPUR, 2 MARCH

The Chhattisgarh government has launched a bus service connecting seven panchayats, including the previously inaccessible village of Pamed, marking a significant shift in the insurgency-affected Bijapur district. This initiative follows extensive operations by security forces aimed at reducing Naxal activities, which have long plagued the region with incidents such as IED blasts and ambushes.

Prior to this service, reaching Pamed involved a detour through Telangana, adding approximately 200 kilometres to the journey. After 50 years, the introduction of the passenger bus service promises to enhance connectivity for locals. Bijapur Collector Sambit Mishra noted the restoration of vital links following the establishment of security camps, which have allowed for improved infrastructure and amenities.

The bus service is expected to benefit over 21 villages, facilitating better access to local markets and services. Villagers have expressed enthusiasm for the new transport option. *—PTI*

Thane: Minor raped, forced to undergo abortion; 2 held

THANE, 2 MARCH

PHOTO: PIXABAY

A man has been arrested in Thane district, Maharashtra, for allegedly raping a 17-year-old girl and coercing her into undergoing an abortion using false documentation. The foetus, which was buried at a crematorium in Ulhasnagar, has been exhumed as part of the ongoing investigation.

The accused, a 29-year-old neighbour, allegedly assaulted the minor multiple times after luring her to his home under the pretext of having dinner while his family was away. He threatened her with violence if she disclosed the incidents. Upon discovering her pregnancy, the victim informed the accused, who provided her with abortion pills sourced from a private practitioner.

After a failed attempt, the victim's situation escalated when she was taken to a hospital for an abortion, facilitated by the accused's family, who provided falsified identification. The procedure was carried out at a civic hospital in Kalyan.

The matter came to light on 23 February when the victim confided in her mother. Subsequently, her family filed a report with the police. The accused was apprehended on 25 February, and the medical practitioner involved in the initial abortion attempt was arrested. *—PTI*

Thrissur: 5 held for assaulting woman over spa dispute

THRISSUR, 2 MARCH

A five-member gang has been apprehended for allegedly abducting and assaulting a young woman over a financial dispute related to a spa centre. The arrests occurred on Sunday following police revelations regarding the incident.

The suspects have been identified as Gopakumar alias Gopu, 43, from Thrissur, Abhinash P Shankar, 30, from Kozhikode, Jithin Joshi, 27, from Thrissur, Aathira, 30, and Anju, 30.

According to reports, the financial disagreement originated between Gopakumar and Akhil, with whom the victim had a close association. The woman was assaulted during her confinement, and her gold jewellery, was stolen. *—PTI*

Kottayam: 4-yr-old falls ill after eating chocolate, drug traces found

KOTTAYAM, 2 MARCH

The hospitalisation of a four-year-old boy in Kottayam has raised concerns after he became drowsy following the alleged consumption of chocolate at school. A urine test conducted at Amrita Hospital in Ernakulam revealed the presence of benzodiazepines, a type of depressant, raising questions about how the substance entered the child's system.

The incident unfolded on 17 February when the boy complained of dizziness after returning home from school. His mother discovered that a teacher noted the child had been seen eating a chocolate earlier that day. Initially taken to a nearby hospital, he was later transferred to Amrita Hospital due to severe drowsiness and high blood pressure, which necessitated his stay in the ICU for several days.

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- A urine test conducted at Amrita Hospital in Ernakulam revealed the presence of benzodiazepines, a type of depressant, raising questions about how the substance entered the child's system

According to the Manarcad police, no formal case has been opened as of yet, with a preliminary enquiry finding no negligence on the part of the private school. The school's officials stated the child appeared healthy when he left. Notably, another child who shared the chocolate did not suffer any adverse effects.

The child's mother, a lab technician who is separated from her husband, has made complaints to the District Collector and the Superintendent of Police, demanding a thorough investigation. *—PTI*

CYCLONE & MONSOON

NOAA layoffs threaten critical weather forecasts

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Scientists and policymakers are expressing alarm over recent layoffs at the United States climate agency, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), warning that a reduction in observation data may undermine monsoon forecasts and cyclone tracking in India.

Last week, hundreds of federal NOAA employees, including essential meteorologists responsible for local forecasts at national weather service offices, were dismissed. M Ravichandran, Secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, remarked, "We are worried. If NOAA reduces observations, there will be implications on weather forecasts. Reduced ocean observations result in less data for analysis, consequently diminishing predictability."

Hundreds of federal NOAA employees responsible for local forecasts at national weather service offices, were dismissed last week PHOTO: X

Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Indian Institute for Tropical Meteorology, labelled the layoffs a global crisis with substantial ramifications for climate science. "For India, monsoon forecasts, cyclone tracking, and climate projections depend heavily on NOAA's models," said Koll, an author for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports.

He noted that the layoffs represent a broader threat to global climate resilience, stating, "Half of the Indian Ocean's observational network is backed by NOAA. Without this foundation, early warnings for floods, heatwaves, and storms will weaken, endangering millions."

Another meteorologist shared that communications from NOAA have indicated an inability to maintain prior levels of service. Koll emphasised the importance of international collaboration in climate research, contending that monitoring global oceans is essential for accurate weather predictions in India, and no single nation can accomplish this alone. *—PTI*

Disgusting: Raveena on men filming Katrina Kaif

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Actress Raveena Tandon has expressed her outrage over a man's actions during Bollywood star Katrina Kaif's holy dip at the Triveni Sangam during the Maha Kumbh pilgrimage. The incident occurred on February 24, when Katrina, who is married to Vicky Kaushal, visited Prayagraj with her mother-in-law, Veena Kaushal.

Raveena was also present on the same day and participated in the evening aarti ceremony alongside daughter Rasha Thadani and Katrina. In a video that surfaced on social media, a man can be seen filming Katrina as she took the holy dip, stating, "Ye main hoon, ye mera bhai hai aur ye Katrina Kaif" (This is me, that is my brother and that's Katrina Kaif), while other men around him laughed.

Raveena took to Instagram to comment on the situation, saying, "This is disgusting. These kinds of people spoil a moment that is supposed to be peaceful and meaningful." Many users echoed her sentiments, describing the behaviour as "mass bullying" and "disrespectful."

Numerous celebrities, including Anupam Kher, Preity Zinta, and Akshay Kumar, attended the Maha Kumbh, which concluded on 26 February. *—PTI*

SKI TO THE HEART'S DELIGHT

The Vasaloppet, the world's oldest cross-country ski race, began Sunday in Sälen, Sweden. Covering 90km through forests, hills, and frozen lakes, the race ends in Mora. Established in 1922 and part of the Worldloppet events since 1979, the race commemorates King Gustav Vasa's 1520-1521 journey from Mora to Sälen. ***PHOTO: PTI***

From 1954 to 2025, UP learns to live with Kumbh stampedes

"My uncle had saved his sister by pulling her out of the river waters by her hair as she slipped below amid the commotion," says city-based advocate Niranjan Lal recalling the 1954 Kumbh Mela stampede stories he had heard from his aunt who survived it.

This was the first Kumbh in Allahabad after Independence, and the tragic incident took place on February 3 on the occasion of Mauni Amavasya. According to official estimates, several hundred had died in the stampede.

Seventy-one years later, a stampede took place on 29 January, again on Mauni Amavasya day as a massive crowd sought to enter into the Triveni Sangam waters for the 'amrit snan'.

Lal, 67, and his wife were camping in a Swiss cottage in Sector 6 of Mahakukbh Nagar, when they got a call from their son at home late night, cautioning them not to go to the Sangam due to the stampede.

"We didn't step out from the camp until the sun came out, and at around 11am, we went to Dashashwamedh Ghat on Ganga, located near Sector 6. There were huge crowds in the mela area, in the streets and at the ghat. We were aware of the tragedy that had unfolded a few hours ago, and therefore we were alert, and being a local resident knew what to do in case the crowd became unmanageable," Lal told PTI here.

"But, we didn't go back feeling fearful. My wife continued to camp until the 'kalpwas' period was over, continuing the multi-generation tradition of our family," he said.

Lal belongs to an old family of Allahabad (renamed Prayagraj in 2018), many of whose members have performed 'kalpwas' and bathing rituals at all Kumbh melas held here post Independence.

His wife, Saloni Niranjan kept the family tradition, and observed the rituals at Maha Kumbh this year, after her mother-in-law's death in 2019.

Workers clear garbage from the Sangam area after the conclusion of Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Sunday ***PHOTO: PTI***

"We were married in 1988, and few months later, the 1989 Kumbh Mela happened. And, I and my wife have been part of all successive Kumbh also since then. But, the 1954 tragedy is something my uncle and 'bua' (aunt) used to talk about. She told me how she was saved by my father's elder brother while she was drowning during the incident," Lal reminisced, adding, his 'bua' who was born in 1920s and also used to observe rituals, died in 1986.

Lal's father, Govind Prasad, a government officer was at the family camp in the mela area when the disaster took place.

The incident of the 1954 stampede was then described as a "national tragedy".

Akshat Lal, 32, son of Niranjan Lal, says, he used to hear stories about the old Kumbh Melas from his grandmother and aunt, whose mother was rescued during the 1954 stampede.

"The scale of the tragedy was such that the entire country was shaken. Every other old family in Allahabad either has a personal story attached to it, or they know someone having some link with the tragedy," he told PTI.

The young scholar, who even wrote a 100-odd-page book 'Kumbh: A Divine Show at Allahabad' in 2013, has researched extensively on the subject.

Another stampede took place at Allahabad Junction (now Prayagraj Junction) during the 2013 Kumbh Mela in which scores of people died. After the 1954 stampede, an inquiry committee was set up and it made a slew of recommendations for better crowd management and ensuring the safety of pilgrims. "If one looks at the Maha Kumbh 2025, a VVIP culture was promoted during it, and aggressive marketing and '144 years' hype was used to draw people to the mela. The authorities were somehow complacent and some so-called celebrities were telling on social media that arrangements were 'great' and people should flock to Sangam, which were a factor for overcrowding and eventually a stampede," he alleged.

The Uttar Pradesh government had, however, maintained that ample arrangements were made, and the theme itself was 'Bhavya Divya Surakshit Maha Kumbh'.

PTI spoke to many other residents of the city who either witnessed January 29 stampede or its aftermath or knew someone who was present there in the mela.

Renu Devi, a domestic help, said, she saw piles of footwear and bags at the ghats and also many floating in the river the day the stampede took place.

"I saw people being taken away in ambulances, it was panic all over," she said.

For people like Devi, however, faith overpowers fear, as she said, "I took holy dip for five times during this Kumbh, mostly after the stampede".

Maha Kumbh, the spectacle that takes place once in 12 years, was held this year from 13 January (Paush Purnima) to 26 February (Mahashivratri) and saw grand processions of Naga Sadhus and three 'Amrit Snans'. The mega religious gathering drew a record over 66 crore pilgrims during this period.

At least 30 people died and 60 were injured in the stampede January 29 month, according to official figures. However, several opposition parties and many of their leaders have questioned the veracity of the toll, and claimed that the number of casualties is far higher.

A resident said, "I know some persons who were there when the stampede happened. Going by what they saw that night, the figure of 30 seem rather low given the scale of the crowd." Author Kama Maclean in her 2008 book 'Pilgrimage and Power: The Kumbh Mela in Allahabad 1765-1954', writes that while she was in Uttar Pradesh to research for the book, she was "struck by the number of people whose immediate reaction was to tell me about the 1954 Kumbh Tragedy, at which they or their parents, relatives or acquaintances had been present". Advocate Lal says, "We in Allahabad feel blessed that it is the site of Triveni, and look forward to it every 12 years, but there is always a sense of fear that a stampede may happen." *—PTI*

SALAR سالار

40% globally lacks education in their own language: UN

Forty per cent of the global population does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand, according to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) team.

Despite countries' growing understanding of the role of home language, policy uptake remains limited. Implementation challenges include limited teacher capacity to use home languages, unavailability of materials in home languages and community opposition, it said.

In some low-and middle-income countries, this figure rises to 90 per cent. More than a quarter of a billion learners are affected, GEM officials said, recommending nations to implement multilingual education policies and practices with the goal of creating educational systems that benefit all learners.

The team, which has come up with a report titled "Languages matter: Global guidance on multilingual education", noted that as migration increases, linguistic diversity is becoming a global reality and classrooms with learners from diverse language backgrounds are more common. Over 31 million displaced youth are facing language barriers in education.

The report was compiled on the 25th anniversary of International Mother Language Day, celebrating a quarter-century of dedicated efforts to preserve and promote the use of mother tongues.

The report comes at a time when India is in the process of implementing the new National Education Policy (NEP) that advocates multilingual education. The three-language policy in school education has drawn opposition from some states.

"Today 40 per cent of people globally lack access to education in the language they speak and understand fluently. In some low- and middle-income countries, this figure rises to 90 per cent. More than a quarter of a billion learners are affected," a senior GEM team member told PTI.

"The first thing to note is that over the course of this decade, which has been marked by the pervasive influence of technology in young people's lives but also by the impact of Covid-19, learning levels have dropped sharply in both reading and mathematics. But the next thing to note is that the impact has been disproportionate on learners who are disadvantaged due to linguistic reasons," the official added.

According to the analysis by the team, the gap between the two groups increased on average between 2010 and 2022, from 12 to 18 percentage points in reading and from 10 to 15 percentage points in mathematics. This suggests that learners who do not speak the language of instruction at home, whether for historical reasons or due to migration and displacement, are at a bigger risk of leaning loss.

"Countries face diverse linguistic challenges in education, stemming from both historical and contemporary factors. In the first category, often as a legacy of colonialism, languages have been imposed on local populations that prevented their use for instruction and created educational disparities.

"At the same time, large linguistic diversity in some countries presents challenges for education systems, as resources for implementing multilingual education programmes tend to be limited," the report said.

In the second category, immigration brings new languages to classrooms in richer countries, enriching linguistic diversity but also posing challenges in instruction and assessment.

"These countries often grapple with issues such as language acquisition support for immigrant students, developing inclusive curricula that reflect diversity, and ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of their linguistic background. The context each country faces means the policy solutions required are different," it added.

The GEM team has recommended that educational language policies should prioritise context-specific approaches and language transition must be backed by curriculum adjustments and supported by teaching and learning materials adapted for that grade.

"In countries with significant immigrant populations, policies should support the development and implementation of effective bridging language programmes, qualified teachers, and support inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse linguistic needs of all," it said.

"In multilingual contexts, training should ensure proficiency in both home and second languages; teacher deployment could match the teacher's language fluency with the language of instruction of the target school; early childhood educators should be trained on culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy," it added.

Planning for strong support systems outside of schools to ensure the success of new multilingual education policies and supporting school leaders to foster inclusion in schools are also among the recommendations.

"Countries should ensure that the selection, recruitment and training of school leaders includes a focus on fostering inclusion in schools, inclusive of multi-lingual students' needs. School leader professional standards should emphasise the importance of collaboration between leaders and parents and the community to build bridges between linguistic groups," it said. *—PTI*

In some low-and middle-income countries, this figure rises to 90 per cent. ***PHOTO: UNESCO***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Bihar women farmers turn to solar pumps, overcoming patriarchy

Indu Devi, a 35-year-old widow from Suryahi village, knows the weight of despair all too well. When her husband was hanged over a land dispute, she was left with little more than a small patch of land and debts.

But then, she heard about the concept of using solar pumps in fields for business. Despite her initial fears of how would she, a woman with no technical knowledge, operate a pump? She took the leap of faith.

Today, she earns a steady income by supplying water to neighbouring fields.

"It's just a switch on and off. But it has given me a way to survive," she said.

In this area, Indu's story is inspirational but not unique. A number of women, as part of self-help groups (SHGs), have invested in solar pumps on their land for irrigation, transforming their lives and livelihoods.

For decades, irrigation has been a major challenge in Bihar. With erratic rainfall, extreme summers amid climate change and unreliable electricity, farmers have struggled to grow crops.

Diesel pumps were expensive and inefficient, leaving smallholder farmers, especially women, at the mercy of the weather.

"The introduction of solar-powered irrigation pumps has changed the game. These pumps, operated by women, provide water at a fraction of the cost, ensuring that even the smallest plots of land can flourish," said Mukesh Chandra, team leader at Aga Khan Rural Support Programme, who helped with the installation of the solar pumps in Muzaffarpur.

But stepping out for women has not been easy.

Devki Devi, a mother of three from Kakrachak in Muzaffarpur, recalled how her alcoholic husband initially resisted the idea of a solar pump.

"He didn't let me leave the house for the SHG meetings. But when I told him about the income we could earn, he finally agreed," she said.

With a loan of Rs 1.5 lakh and a 10 per cent interest rate, Devki installed a 5 HP capacity pump in July 2023. She now supplies water to 12 farms at a rate of Rs 229 per acre, less than the amount spent on diesel pumps. In just a few months, she has earned enough to cover her family's expenses and even save some money in the bank.

However, the struggle of these women with men in their families continues.

Women like Sita Devi and Rashmi Kumari have faced resistance from their families and communities.

"Patriarchy still beats us," said Sangita, who was forced to hand over her earnings to her husband.

One of another challenges is the initial capital investment. Many women, especially those from marginalized communities, struggle to arrange the funds needed to install the solar pumps.

Like Sangita Devi, a 75-year-old from Karanpur, who just had enough land to install a solar pump, addressed this by taking a Rs 2.5 lakh loan from her village SHG. With her children grown and gone, she had no source of income.

Today, she supplies water to nearby farms and dreams of converting her thatched hut into a pucca home with her savings.

"Right now, I am paying back the loan but soon...," she said.

Another challenge is the maintenance of the solar panels. While the pumps are relatively easy to operate, keeping the panels clean and ensuring they function optimally requires regular attention. The women have risen to this challenge, learning the basics of maintenance and even training others in their communities, Chandra said.

But despite these challenges, the women have persevered.

They have learned to operate and maintain the systems, proving that they are just as capable as men and the benefits are far more for them. The solar pumps have significantly reduced the cost of irrigation, making it more affordable for smallholder farmers.

In some cases, the cost has been reduced by as much as 50 per cent, allowing farmers to invest in better seeds, fertilizers, and other inputs. This has led to an increase in agricultural output, improving food security and boosting incomes, Chandra said.

The impact of these solar pumps goes beyond irrigation.

Women are exploring new avenues, from setting up atta chakkis (flour mills) to running rice mills powered by solar energy. The savings from reduced irrigation costs have allowed families to invest in their children's education, pay off debts, and even plan for weddings.

The women of Bihar are not just earning an income, they are contributing to their communities, challenging gender norms, and building a more sustainable future.

In the villages of Bihar, where the sun once scorched the land, it now brings life. And for the women who have embraced this change, it has brought something even more precious -- hope for a better life. *—PTI*

For decades, irrigation has been a major challenge in Bihar. With erratic rainfall, extreme summers amid climate change and unreliable electricity, farmers have struggled to grow crops ***PHOTO: PTI***

- The impact of these solar pumps goes beyond irrigation. Women are exploring new avenues, from setting up atta chakkis (flour mills) to running rice mills powered by solar energy. The savings from reduced irrigation costs have allowed families to invest in their children's education, pay off debts, and even plan for weddings.

PHOTO: ANI

Two JUI-F leaders shot dead in Pakistan

KHUZDAR, 2 MARCH

Two leaders of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) Balochistan were killed in the Zehri area of Pakistan's Khuzdar district on Saturday, according to officials, Dawn reported. The JUI-F leaders, Wadera Ghulam Sarwar and Molvi Amanullah, were heading to home in Zehri's Tarsani area, when unknown assailants riding motorcycles opened fire on them using automatic weapons. The two leaders died on the spot after being shot multiple times. One of the leaders' security guards also received bullet injuries. Levies took the bodies and injured to a local hospital while killers managed to escape. No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, which Levies officials called target killing. A probe has been initiated into the incident. *—ANI*

Pope stable, resting in hospital: Vatican

ROME, 2 MARCH

Pope Francis was in stable condition and resting on Sunday as he continued his recovery from double pneumonia, but again skipped his weekly noon blessing to avoid even a brief public appearance. For the third weekend in a row, Francis cancelled the appointment delivering the Angelus prayer. He could have delivered it from his 10th floor hospital suite at the Gemelli hospital if he were well enough. Instead, the Vatican planned to distribute the prepared text as Francis continued his recovery. "The night was quiet, the pope is still resting," the Vatican said in its Sunday update. He had no fever or signs of elevated white blood cells, which would signal his body was still fighting an infection. *—PTI*

Child dies of Ebola in Uganda

KAMPALA, 2 MAR

A 4-year-old child became the second person to die of Ebola in Uganda, the World Health Organisation has said, in a setback for health officials who had hoped for a quick end to the outbreak that began at the end of January. The child had been hospitalised at the main referral facility in Kampala, the capital of the East African country, and died Tuesday, the WHO office in Uganda said in a brief statement on Saturday. There were no other details about the death and local health officials were not commenting on the case. The death undermines Ugandan officials' assertions of an outbreak under control after eight Ebola patients were discharged earlier in February. *—PTI*

Iranian minister fired over plummeting rial

TEHRAN, 2 MARCH

Iran's parliament on Sunday impeached the country's economy minister and voted to remove him from office, amid growing concerns over the crashing rial and accusations of mismanagement. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf announced that 182 out of 273 lawmakers voted to dismiss Abdolnasser Hemmati, just six months after President Masoud Pezeshkian's government took office. Pezeshkian, who defended Hemmati, emphasised that the government is locked in a tough battle with the West. He called for greater unity and cooperation from Parliament to face these challenges. Iran's economy has been severely affected by international sanctions, especially after the US withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal. This latest development is another chapter in Iran's ongoing political and economic struggles. *—PTI*

Israel cuts off aid to Gaza

Pressure aims at forcing Hamas to accept new truce proposal

TEL AVIV, 2 MARCH

Israel stopped the entry of all goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip on Sunday and warned of "additional consequences" if Hamas does not accept a new proposal for an extension of the first phase of a fragile ceasefire.

Hamas accused Israel of trying to derail the truce and said its decision to cut off aid was "cheap extortion, a war crime and a blatant attack on the (ceasefire) agreement." Both sides stopped short of saying the ceasefire had ended.

The first phase of the ceasefire, which included a surge in humanitarian assistance, expired on Saturday. The two sides have yet to negotiate the second phase, in which Hamas was to release dozens of remaining hostages in return for an Israeli pullout and a lasting ceasefire.

An Israeli official, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said the decision to suspend aid was made in coordination with the Trump administration.

Israelis stand on the side of a road to bid a farewell for the slain hostage Shlomo Mantzur, in southern Israel PHOTO: PTI

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said earlier on Sunday that it supports what it described as a proposal from US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff to extend the first phase of the ceasefire through Ramadan and Passover, which end on April 20.

Under that proposal, Hamas would release half the hostages on the first day and the rest when an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire, according toNetanyahu's office. There was no immediate comment from the United States, Egypt or Qatar, which have been mediating between Israel and Hamas for over a year.

Under the first, six-week phase of the ceasefire, Hamas released 25 Israeli hostages and the bodies of eight others in exchange for the release of nearly 2,000 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Israeli forces pulled back from most of Gaza and Israel allowed a surge of humanitarian aid to enter.

But the first phase was marred by repeated disputes, with each side accusing the other of violations. Israeli strikes killed dozens of Palestinians who the military said had approached its forces or entered certain areas is violation of the truce. *— PTI*

Judge blocks watchdog Chief's removal

WASHINGTON, 2 MARCH

The head of a federal watchdog agency must remain in his job, a judge in Washington ruled on Saturday, saying President Donald Trump's bid to remove the special counsel was unlawful.

US District Judge Amy Berman Jackson sided with Hampton Dellinger, who leads the Office of Special Counsel, in a legal battle over the president's authority to oust the head of the independent agency that's likely headed back to the US Supreme Court.

Dellinger sued Trump last month after he was fired, even though the law says special counsels can be removed by the president "only for inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office." Jackson, who was nominated to the bench by Democratic president Barack Obama, quickly reinstated Dellinger in the job while he pursued his case.

Jackson rejected the Trump administration's claims that the special counsel's removal protections are unconstitutional because they prevent the president from rightfully installing his preferred agency head. The judge said allowing the president to remove the special counsel at will would have a chilling effect on his crucial duties, which include guarding the federal workforce from illegal personnel actions, such as retaliation for whistleblowing.

"The Special Counsel is supposed to withstand the winds of political change and help ensure that no government servant of either party becomes the subject of prohibited employment practices or faces reprisals for calling out wrongdoing - by holdovers from a previous administration or by officials of the new one," Jackson wrote in her decision. The Justice Department quickly filed court papers indicating it will challenge the ruling to Washington's federal appeals court. The case has already gone up once to the Supreme Court, which previously temporarily allowed Dellinger to remain in his job. *—PTI*

US TO DEPLOY 3,000 MORE TROOPS TO SOUTHERN BORDER

The US Department of Defence said that about 3,000 more soldiers will be deployed to its southern border with Mexico. About 2,400 soldiers from the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) and 500 soldiers from the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade will be sent, US Northern Command (NORTHCOM) said in a statement. "These deployments will bring additional agility and capability to further efforts to stop the flow of illegal migrancy and drugs at the southern border," its commander, General Gregory Guillot said.

PRO-UKRAINE PROTEST

Thousands of people protest in support of Ukraine, demanding an end to Russia's invasion in Boston, Massachusetts, on Sunday. This comes after US President Donald Trump and Vice- President JD Vance's angry exchange with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House PHOTO: EPA

Anti-DOGE protests hit Tesla stores

BOSTON, 2 MARCH

Demonstrators gathered outside Tesla stores across the US Saturday to protest the automaker's billionaire CEO, Elon Musk, and his push to slash government spending on behalf of President Donald Trump.

The demonstrations are part of a growing backlash in North America and Europe to Musk's disruptive role in Washington.

Critics of Trump and Musk hope to discourage and stigmatise purchases of Tesla, the electric car company that is the world's most valuable automaker. Liberal groups for weeks have organized anti-Tesla protests in hopes of galvanizing opposition to Musk's Department of Government Efficiency and energising Democrats still demoralized by Trump's November victory.

"We can get back at Elon," said Nathan Phillips, a 58-year-old ecologist from Newton, Massachusetts, who was protesting in Boston on Saturday. "We can impose direct economic damage on Tesla by showing up at showrooms everywhere and boycotting Tesla and telling everyone else to get out, sell your stocks, sell your Teslas." *— PTI*

WHITE HOUSE SHOWDOWN

Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves, UK PM Keir Starmer and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiyy in London PHOTO: PTI

UK, France join hands to end Ukraine war

LONDON, 2 MARCH

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer says Britain, France and Ukraine have agreed to work on a ceasefire plan to present to the United States.

Starmer says the plan emerged after talks among the four countries' leaders following Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Oval Office blowout with US President Donald Trump.

The prime minister told the BBC he believes the US president wants a durable peace in Ukraine. He repeated his assertion that American security guarantees will be needed to make it stick.

Starmer is hosting a summit of European leaders in London on Sunday to discuss Ukraine.

It was supposed to cap a week of whirlwind diplomacy advancing the prospect of peace in Ukraine.

But a summit of European leaders on Sunday has been overshadowed by the extraordinary scolding by US President Donald Trump of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House on Friday for being ungrateful for US support. The London meeting has now taken on greater importance in defending the war-torn ally. "There's a real problem for European leaders to pick up the pieces and try and move forward," Peter Ricketts, the former British national security adviser, told BBC radio on Saturday.

"It's going to be a damage limitation exercise. It's going to have to be an exercise in where do we go from here?"

The meeting at Lancaster House, a 200-year-old elegant mansion near Buckingham Palace, follows a charm offensive last week to engage with Trump at the White House to put Ukraine at the centre of negotiations and tilt his allegiances toward Europe. *—PTI*

Mend ties with Trump: NATO to Zelenskyy

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte has said he told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that he had to "find a way to restore his relationship with the American president". Rutte told the BBC that he told Zelenskyy that "he really had to respect what Donald Trump has done so far for Ukraine". He was referring to the first Trump administration's decision in 2019 to supply Ukraine with Javelin antitank missiles that Ukraine used to effect against Russian tanks in the first wave of the 2022 invasion.

Syrians observe first Ramadan without Assad family rule in decades

DAMASCUS, 2 MARCH

Some restaurants and coffee shops in Syria were closed during the day Saturday while others opened as usual as observant Muslims began fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, the first since the fall of Assad family rule in the war-torn country.

Syria's interim Ministry of Religious Endowments reportedly ordered that all restaurants, coffee shops and street food stands be closed during the day and that people must not eat or drink in public or face punishment. Those who violate the rule could get up to three months in jail.

Some coffee shops were opened but had their windows closed to that people can't see who is inside.

Insurgents led by the Islamist Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, , overthrew President Bashar Assad's secular government in early December ending the 54-year Assad family dynasty. Since then, Syria's new Islamist government under former insurgent leader Ahmad al-Sharaa, has been in control and many fear that the country could turn into an Islamic state.

A table is prepared for iftar, organized by the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) in Damascus, Syria PHOTO: PTI

Under Assad's rule during Ramadan, when observant Muslims abstain from eating and drinking from sunrise to sunset, people were allowed to eat in public. This year, many people are abstaining from eating in public fearing reprisals. *—PTI*

Argentina okays IMF deal, lauds economic wins

BUENOS AIRES, 2 MARCH

Argentina's libertarian president Javier Milei signalled late Saturday that a new deal with the International Monetary Fund was imminent, as he used his annual address to congress to project an optimistic picture of his economic overhaul following a divisive first year in office and recent swirl of controversies.

In a speech Milei promised the crisis-stricken nation that, in the coming days, he would "ask congress to support the government in this new agreement with the International Monetary Fund" even as it seemed Argentina had yet to close the deal.

Revisiting the economic themes of his 2023 presidential campaign ahead of crucial midterm elections in October, Milei declared: "We went from talking about hyperinflation to talking about long-term stability."

Javier Milei PHOTO: X

He cited his standard refrain about the government's success in dragging down the monthly inflation rate from a peak of 26 per cent in December 2023, when he entered office, to just over 2 per cent in January, and in helping the country claw its way out of a painful recession.

"We have gone from being a global laughing stock ... to being an unexpected protagonist," he said. *— PTI*

'WE'RE ON THE MOON'

Pvt spacecraft touches down on moon

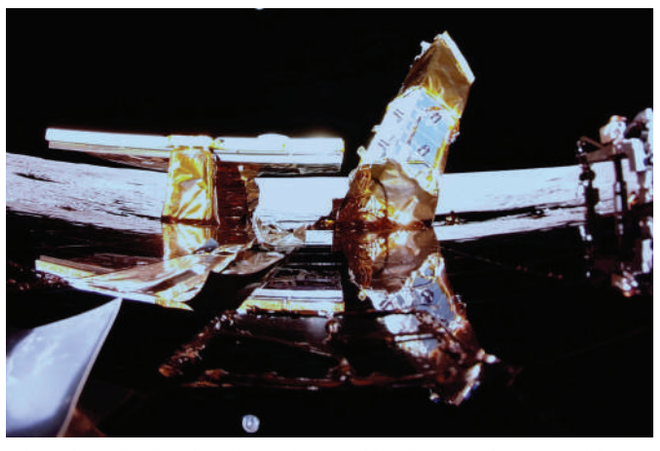
CAPE CANAVERAL, 2 MARCH

A private lunar lander carrying a drill, vacuum and other experiments for NASA touched down on the moon Sunday, the latest in a string of companies looking to kickstart business on Earth's celestial neighbour ahead of astronaut missions.

Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost lander descended from lunar orbit on autopilot, aiming for the slopes of an ancient volcanic dome in an impact basin on the moon's northeastern edge of the near side.

Confirmation of touchdown came from the company's Mission Control outside Austin, Texas, following the action some 225,000 miles (360,000 kilometers) away.

"We're on the moon," Mission Control reported, adding the lander was "stable."



Private lunar lander Blue Ghost after touching down on the moon with a special delivery for NASA PHOTO: PTI

A smooth, upright landing makes Firefly — a startup founded a decade ago — the first private outfit to put a spacecraft on the moon without crashing or falling over. Even countries have faltered, with only five claiming success: Russia, the US, China, India and Japan.

Two other companies' landers are hot on Blue Ghost's heels, with the next one expected to join it on the moon later this week. Launched in mid-January from Florida, 2 meters tall lander carried 10 experiments to the moon for NASA. The space agency paid USD 101 million for the delivery, plus $44 million for the science and tech on board. It's the third mission under NASA's commercial lunar delivery program, intended to ignite a lunar economy of competing private businesses while scouting around before astronauts show up later this decade. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Hindustan Zinc aims to double output to 2 MTPA in 5 years

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Vedanta Group firm Hindustan Zinc aims to double its metal production to two million tonnes per annum (MTPA) within the next five years, Chairperson Priya Agarwal Hebbar said.

The company's current metal production capacity is 1.1 MTPA. The company, she said, is also expanding into critical minerals and has been declared the preferred bidder for several blocks across the country.

Hindustan Zinc's roaster and fertiliser plant projects are on track, strengthening its growth pipeline.

Hindustan Zinc Ltd had reported a 32 per cent rise in consolidated net profit at Rs 2,678 crore for the quarter ended 31 December, 2024. The company had posted consolidated net profit of Rs 2,028 crore in the year-ago period. *—PTI*

Wave Group, Agristo to invest ₹750 cr in UP potato plant

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Wave Group and Belgium's Agristo NV will invest around ₹750 crore to expand their potato processing plant in Uttar Pradesh to make premium french fries, amid rising global demand for processed food. In 2019, Wave Group firm Masa Global Food Pvt Ltd and Agristo's subsidiary firm IMSTO NV, Belgium had formed a 50:50 joint venture firm to establish a potato processing plant at Bijnor to make dehydrated potato flakes. The name of the joint venture firm is Agristo Masa Pvt Ltd. The plant started operations in 2022 with an annual capacity of 7,500 tonnes. Around 2,500 farmers are expected to benefit from this expansion. Wave Group is into real estate, sugar and food processing businesses. It has real estate projects in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. *—PTI*

Coal India arm NCL hopes to achieve target of 139 MT

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Coal India arm Northern Coalfields Ltd (NCL) expects to achieve the production target of 139 million tonnes for the current fiscal. In a statement, NCL said that till February the subsidiary produced 128.13 million tonnes and "we are hopeful that we will also achieve our annual target".

The company's dispatch was 125.78 MT in the April-February period of the current fiscal. NCL's dispatch target for the current fiscal is 139 million tonnes. NCL is a major contributor towards fulfilling the energy requirement of the nation. About 88 per cent of the coal produced is dispatched to the power sector. NCL has a share of about 15 per cent in the nation's total coal production i.e. a contribution of about 10 per cent in total power generation. *—PTI*

Excelsoft files papers with SEBI for Rs 700 cr IPO

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Excelsoft Technologies Ltd, a vertical SaaS (software-as-a-service) company focused on the learning and assessment market, has filed draft papers with capital markets regulator SEBI to raise Rs 700 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The proposed IPO of the Karnataka-based company is a combination of a fresh issue of shares valued Rs 210 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of shares worth Rs 490 crore by the promoters -- Pedanta Technologies and Dhananjaya Sudhanva, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The company may consider mobilising up to Rs 270 crore in pre-IPO round. *—PTI*

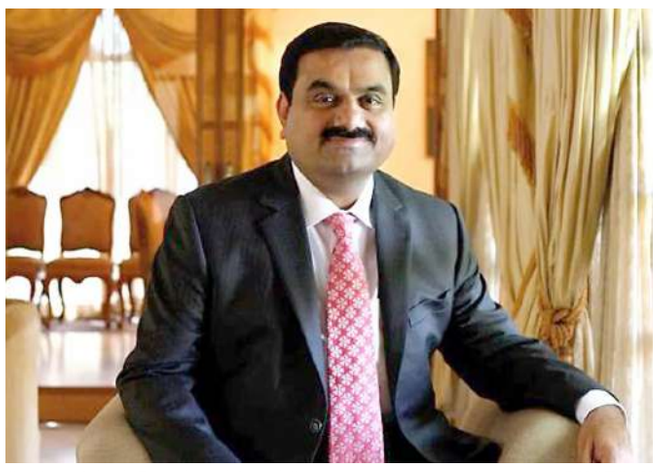
Adani plans to invest in US amid bribery case: Report

Adani is exploring ventures in nuclear, utilities & ports in US

WASHINGTON, 2 MARCH

The Adani Group has reportedly restarted its plans for large-scale investments in the United States, despite ongoing legal troubles involving its founder, Gautam Adani. According to repors, the conglomerate is exploring ventures in nuclear energy, utilities, and the establishment of a port on the US East Coast.

The revival of investment plans comes amid allegations against Adani and several others in connection with a $265 million bribery case linked to an Indian solar energy firm. Initially, Adani had pledged a $10 billion investment in the US after Donald Trump's electoral victory in 2023, with expectations of creating around 15,000 jobs. However, the bribery accusations seemingly put those plans on hold.



Gautam Adani, Founder of Adani Group PHOTO: X

Sources familiar with the matter suggest a shift in Adani Group's stance following Trump's recent call to halt enforcement of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act.

Another source close to the company stated, "We are clear about our investment intentions, but we will wait until this matter is resolved."

Despite past discussions with US firms about petrochemical projects in Texas, Adani Group's footprint in the country remains limited. Michael Kugelman, a South Asia expert at the Wilson Center in Washington, told FT that if the charges are dropped, Adani is expected to move forward with his US investment ambitions.

The Adani Group has denied all allegations, calling them "baseless," and has not issued a statement. *—Agencies*

Markets may face volatile trends ahead as investor sentiment continue to remain weak due to escalating trade tariff concerns PHOTO: X

Tariff, global trends, FIIs key drivers for mkts

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Equity markets will take cues from the US tariff related developments, global trends and trading activity of foreign investors this week, analysts said.

Markets may face volatile trends going ahead as investor sentiment continue to remain weak due to escalating trade tariff concerns and foreign fund outflows, experts noted.

From macroeconomic space, announcement of HSBC manufacturing and services PMI data during the week would also be tracked by investors.

"We expect market to continue to trade with weakness due to weak global sentiments and lack of domestic triggers," Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

The Indian economy grew by 6.2 per cent in the December quarter, recovering sequentially from seven-quarter lows, but the expansion came in lower than last year and at a time when it faces growing headwinds from the threat of a US tariff war. *—PTI*

Indian tariffs are WTO compliant; Govt should convey to US: GTRI

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

India's import duties are in compliance with the global trade rules and the government should convey this to the US administration, economic think tank GTRI said on Sunday.

It also said that negotiating a comprehensive free trade agreement with the US presents several challenges.

The US may push India to open government procurement to American firms, reduce agricultural subsidies, weaken patent protections by allowing evergreening, and remove restrictions on data flows, it said, adding India has resisted these demands for decades and is still not prepared to accept.

US President Donald Trump on multiple occasions have alleged that India has high tariffs and termed it "tariff king" and "tariff abuser".

Tariffs are import duties imposed and collected by the government and paid by companies to bring foreign goods into the country.

"India's tariffs are consistent with WTO (World Trade Organisation) rules.

GTRI also said that negotiating a comprehensive free trade agreement with the US presents several challenges PHOTO: X

The 166-member forum is the only international body that deals with the rules of trade between nations.

"Trump while talking about India's high tariffs conveniently forgets this," he added.

He also said that India's exports to America often have low local value addition and this must be considered when assessing trade balances between the two countries.

The sectors where local value addition in exported goods are low included iPhones, solar panels, diamonds, and petrochemicals, he added. *—PTI*

Organic fertiliser use to add $2.6B revenue: Biogas

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The government's initiative to promote the use of organic fertilizer could add a revenue of USD 2.6 billion for the biogas industry, the Indian Biogas Association (IBA) said on Sunday.

The government has announced an amendment to encourage the use of organic fertilizer for farming methods that are more ecologically friendly, the IBA said in a statement.

The change introduced in February 2025 is believed to be beneficial for farmers and the environment as it will help improve agriculture in the country, it stated.

Organic fertiliser which is produced through the fermentation process in the biogas plant will allow the industry to earn additional income, IBA said.

India currently produces around 1 million metric tonnes of fermented organic manure (FOM), a byproduct from CBG plants. This figure could soar to 7 million metric tonnes with the expansion of biogas projects. *—PTI*

Coal India waives financial coverage charge for non-power sector

MUMBAI, 2 MARCH

State-owned Coal India Limited on Sunday said that non-power sector (NPS) consumers will not have to pay the coal value worth ten days of supply as financial coverage for the dry fuel received via rail transport.

"With the waiver of financial coverage, CIL takes an important step towards reducing transactional complexities and fostering an environment that encourages smooth and efficient business operations," the PSU said in a statement.

The latest decision is one more step in Coal India Ltd's ongoing efforts to streamline operations under the broader ease of doing business initiative, the company said.

"This also helps to reduce the financial burden for NPS consumers and improve their cash liquidity," Coal India Ltd (CIL) noted.

PHOTO: X

The liquidity availability will allow consumers to use the capital for other operational needs and reduce the working capital pressure.

During the ongoing financial year, CIL supplied about 560 million tonnes (MT) of coal to the power sector and nearly 134 MTs to NPS consumers till February. The offtake through rail mode accounted for 55 per cent of CIL's total supplies.

Coal India accounts for over 80 per cent of domestic coal output.

"This initiative is also part of CIL's broader vision to optimise and modernise coal supply processes for all sectors, aligning with the government's ongoing push to make business operations more transparent, accessible, and cost-effective for industries across India," it said. *—PTI*

Tax cuts, repo rate to boost domestic demand

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

India's domestic demand is expected to remain resilient, supported by the personal income tax concessions announced in the 2025 Union budget and the repo rate cut initiated by the Reserve Bank of India, S&P Global Market Intelligence said in a note.

The RBI had reduced the repo rate by 25 basis points in the February monetary policy meeting.

In the Union Budget for 2025-26 tabled on 1 February, the finance minister had announced that no income tax will be payable on income up to Rs 12 lakh, providing significant relief to taxpayers, especially the middle class. Earlier, this limit was Rs 7 lakh. The government expects that taxpayers saving money through lesser income tax will plough it back in the form of either consumption, savings or investments. *—ANI*

GLENMARK RECALLS 15L BOTTLES OF ADHD MEDICATION IN US: USFDA

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

PHOTO: X

Glenmark Pharmaceuticals is recalling close to 15 lakh bottles of a generic medication used in the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in the US market, according to the US health regulator.

Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Inc, USA, a subsidiary of the Mumbai-based drug maker, is recalling around 14.76 lakh bottles of Atomoxetine Capsules in multiple strengths.

The company is recalling the affected lot due to "CGMP Deviations", the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) said in its latest Enforcement Report.

The recall is due to "presence of N-Nitroso Atomoxetine impurity above the FDA recommended limit," it added.

New Jersey-based Glenmark Pharmaceuticals Inc, USA is recalling the made-in-India product in strengths ranging from 10 mg to 100 mg, USFDA stated.

The company initiated the Class II recall on January 29 this year.

As per the USFDA, a Class II recall is initiated in a situation in which use of, or exposure to, a violative product may cause temporary or medically reversible adverse health consequences or where the probability of serious adverse health consequences is remote. *—PTI*

'States' investment index will be out in 2 months'

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

NITI Aayog member Arvind Virmani has said that work on the second phase of the investment friendliness index of states is in progress and it is expected to be released in a month or two.

The Union government in its FY26 Budget announced the launch of the 'Investment Friendliness Index of States' in 2025 to further the spirit of competitive cooperative federalism. This index will motivate states to review regulations to identify what is impeding investment. The initiative aims to promote healthy competition among states to attract private investment.

Arvind Virmani

The Ministry of Finance is working on the parameters related to 'Investment Friendly Index of States' in consultation with NITI Aayog and the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

In an interview with PTI-Bhasha, Virmani said, "The first phase of preparing the index has been completed. Work is going on in the second phase. In this, suggestions are being taken from the industry.

Earlier, Expenditure Secretary Manoj Govil had told PTI that several regulations and reforms have been done at the Centre level but some investors feel similar reforms are needed at the state level too. *—PTI*

Mcap of top 8 firms erodes by ₹3L cr

TCS HIT HARD

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The combined market valuation of eight of the top-10 most valued firms eroded by Rs 3,09,244.57 crore in a holiday-shortened last week, with Tata Consultancy Services taking the biggest hit, in line with bearish trend in equities.

Last week, the BSE benchmark gauge Sensex tanked 2,112.96 points or 2.80 per cent, and the NSE Nifty tumbled 671.2 points or 2.94 per cent.

In February alone, the Nifty dropped 1,383.7 points or 5.88 per cent. The Sensex lost 4,302.47 points or 5.55 per cent.

The market valuation of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) plunged Rs 1,09,211.97 crore to Rs 12,60,505.51 crore, the most among the top-10 firms. With the sharp decline in its market valuation TCS slipped to the third rank in the top-10 most valued firms chart from the previous second place. HDFC Bank overtook TCS to become the second most valuable firm.

The valuation of Infosys tanked Rs 52,697.93 crore to Rs 7,01,002.22 crore.

Bharti Airtel's market valuation eroded by Rs 39,230.1 crore to Rs 8,94,993.67 crore and that of Reliance Industries dropped Rs 38,025.97 crore to Rs 16,23,343.45 crore.

State Bank of India's valuation diminished by Rs 29,718.99 crore to Rs 6,14,236.97 crore.

The market capitalisation (mcap) of ICICI Bank slumped Rs 20,775.78 crore to Rs 8,49,803.90 crore. Reliance Industries remained the most valued firm followed by HDFC Bank, TCS, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Infosys, State Bank of India, Bajaj Finance, Hindustan Unilever and ITC. *—PTI*

NEW REPORT

Indian retail mkt pegged at Rs 190L cr by 2034

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

The Indian retail market is expected to reach over Rs 190 lakh crore by 2034 and retailers capable of embracing the country's diverse demographics and contrasting consumer behaviours stand to gain the most, according to a report.

With distinct consumer groups, each with their own unique needs even within a city, retailers will need to recognise the different opportunities and pick sharply where they want to play to be successful in 'Bharat' and 'India', said the report prepared jointly by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and the Retailers Association of India (RAI).

The retail market in India reached a size of Rs 82 lakh crore in 2024, up from Rs 35 lakh crore in 2014, growing at over 8.9 per cent in the last decade, driven by the India's economic growth and an increasingly discerning and diverse consumer base, said the report titled 'Winning in Bharat & India: The Retail Kaleidoscope'.

While there are opportunities to tap, retailers will have to negotiate complexities in order to be successful PHOTO: X

India's consumption growth trajectory has been secular, barring during the COVID-19 pandemic and it is set to witness the highest growth in consumption between 2024-2034

India's consumption growth trajectory has been secular, barring during the COVID-19 pandemic and it is set to witness the highest growth in consumption between 2024-2034, it noted.

While there are opportunities to tap, retailers will have to negotiate complexities in order to be successful, it noted.

These trends intersect to create what can be called a "retail kaleidoscope", where opportunity abounds but complexity also rises, it noted. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Olympic champion Lydia Ko wins Singapore LPGA

SINGAPORE, 2 MARCH

Lydia Ko claimed her first HSBC Women's World Championship title on Sunday, overcoming a slow start to secure victory by four strokes at Sentosa Golf Club in Singapore. The Olympic gold medallist recovered her momentum with a birdie on the par-5 sixth, followed by two additional birdies, propelling her to a 13-under-par total of 275. Despite two bogeys after the turn, Ko carded a closing round of 69. "I dreamt last night that I won... but I just wanted to focus on my game," she said. World No. 2 Jeeno Thitikul and Japan's Ayaka Furue finished jointly in second on nine under par, while Charley Hull struggled with a final round of 74 to end fourth at seven under. The tournament marks the second of three events in the LPGA's Asian swing. *—PTI*

Yuki wins first ATP 500 doubles title in Dubai

DUBAI, 2 MARCH

Yuki Bhambri of India secured his first ATP 500 men's doubles title alongside Australian partner Alexei Popyrin at the Dubai Tennis Championships. The duo came from behind to defeat world No 14 Harri Heliovaara from Finland and Britain's Henry Patten, winning 3-6 7-6 10-8 after saving four match points in a thrilling match lasting 51 minutes. With this victory, Bhambri is projected to achieve a career-high ranking of No 40 in the PIF ATP Rankings on Monday. Their journey to the title included notable wins over the likes of world No 1 Marcelo Arevalo and a strong performance from Bhambri, who expressed disbelief at reaching and winning the final. Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas claimed the men's singles title, defeating Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime 6-3 6-3. *—PTI*

UP Warriorz hope to win against GG in WPL

LUCKNOW, 2 MARCH

UP Warriorz will aim to bounce back and avenge their earlier defeat when they take on a resurgent Gujarat Giants in their crucial return-leg Women's Premier League fixture here on Monday. A lot has changed since their first meeting on 16 February in Vadodara, where Gujarat Giants secured a six-wicket win. However, Gujarat then suffered back-to-back losses against Mumbai Indians and Delhi Capitals, slipping to bottom-place in the standings. Their playoff hopes were revived with a clinical victory over defending champions RCB in the final match *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

India's Bollipalli wins Chile Open doubles title

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

India's Rithvik Choudary Bollipalli and his Colombian partner Nicolas Barrientos stunned top seeds Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni of Argentina in straight sets to win the Chile Open tennis tournament in Santiago. The unseeded Indo-Colombian pair defeated Gonzalez and Molteni 6-3 6-2 in the final that lasted for a little over one hour on Saturday. Bollipalli and Barrientos dominated from the word go and served 11 aces in the match as against their opponent's just one en route to winning the ATP 250 tournament *—PTI*

CT: KIWIS FALL PREY TO INDIA'S SPIN WIZARDRY

Kane waged lone war as Kiwis were outdone by Indian spinners

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

New Zealand fell to India's spin ploy as the Rohit Sharma-led side decided to drop Harshit Rana and field four spinners for their final group-stage game before the semifinals.

Kane Williamson waged a lone war as the Kiwis continued to get outdone by Indian spinners.

The various renditions of the sweep shot were the escape route that New Zealand batters tried to use to avoid the threat of Indian spinners.

However, with the pitch constantly used, spinners continued to thrive, making the chase a taxing affair for the Blackcaps.

Williamson showcased his composure, reaching a well-earned half-century in 77 balls. However, India continued to chip away at the Kiwi batting lineup.

Kuldeep Yadav wrapped up New Zealand's innings on 205 by sending the ball crashing into the middle and off stump to seal a 44-run victory for India.

> **Virat Kohli's fighting spirit, energy and passion make him a great player**
>
> -Sir Vivian Richards, West Indies legend

Earlier in the match, after the Kiwis elected to bowl first, India was dealt an early setback, as Shubman Gill was trapped leg before wicket by Matt Henry for just two in seven balls. India was 15/1 in 2.5 overs.

Those dismissals hurt India but Hardik, who produced some beefy hits, ensured that India reached near the 250-mark.

Virat Kohli came on the field for his 300th ODI. However, skipper Rohit Sharma could not partner him for too long as a pull shot on Kyle Jamieson's delivery proved to be his downfall.

A poor attempt at pull went into the hands of Will Young at square leg, removing him for 15 in 16 balls.

Virat did look in fine touch, but his eagerness and hurry to stamp his authority proved costly as a rash shot on a Henry delivery landed into the hands of Glenn Phillips at backward point, and the fielder added one more to his glorious catalogue of stunning catches. Virat was gone for 11 in 14 balls. *—ANI*

CT POINTS TABLE

GROUP A	M	W	L	PT
1. IND	3	3	0	6
2. NZ	3	2	1	4
3. BAN	3	0	2	1
4. PAK	3	0	2	1
GROUP B	**M**	**W**	**L**	**PT**
1. SA	3	2	0	5
2. AUS	3	1	0	4
3. AFG	3	0	1	3
4. ENG	3	0	3	0

PHOTO: PTI

Aus, SA forced to travel to UAE for India

DUBAI, 2 MARCH

The Australian team has already left for Dubai while South Africa will leave for the same city late Saturday night ahead of the Champions Trophy semifinals, even though it remains uncertain whether their matches will be held there or not.

Dubai is set to host the first semifinal on Tuesday, with Lahore is hosting the second on Wednesday. Due to security concerns in Pakistan, India are playing all their matches in Dubai.

A source in the know of the happenings in the tournament said that the Australian side have already left for Dubai after a discussion among the members of the team management. They left after their match against Afghanistan which was abandoned due to rain on Friday night in Lahore.

Some of the members of the Afghanistan side also left for Dubai in the same flight to see if they have any chance of making it to the semifinals, according to the source.

Earlier, a BBC report suggested that both Australia and South Africa would have wanted to reach Dubai early to get training time there if they have to face India in the semifinals on Tuesday. India will play their semifinals match in Dubai on Tuesday whether they finish first or second in Group A. *—PTI*

AFTER LOSS LAST YEAR

A magnificent run in domestic cricket this season culminated in a third Ranji Trophy title for Vidarbha on Sunday, who defeated Kerala based on first-innings lead on the fifth and final day of the summit clash at their home ground in Nagpur PHOTO: PTI

Vidarbha clinches 3rd Ranji Trophy title against Kerala

NAGPUR, 2 MARCH

Vidarbha secured their third Ranji Trophy title on Sunday, defeating Kerala based on a first-innings lead on the final day of the match at their home ground.

The team, which posted 379 in their first innings, gained a slight advantage with a lead of 37 runs after dismissing Kerala for 342.

This title marks a significant achievement for Vidarbha, who previously won consecutive titles in the 2017-18 and 2018-19 seasons.

They not only excelled in the Ranji Trophy but also finished as runners-up in the Vijay Hazare Trophy this season. Under the leadership of captain Akshay Wadkar and head coach Usman Ghani, Vidarbha performed outstandingly throughout the tournament, winning nine of their 10 matches.

In the final, Vidarbha, having resumed play with a lead of 286 runs, reached a total of 375 for nine, with Karun Nair top-scoring with 135 runs. Vidarbha's young talents shone brightly, with 22-year-old spinner Harsh Dubey setting a new record for the most wickets in a Ranji season, claiming 69 dismissals, while 24-year-old Yash Rathod scored 960 runs, leading the batting charts.

Following a disappointing loss in last year's final, Wadkar attributed their success to rigorous preparation: "Everyone worked hard throughout, and we're all very happy," he said. Vidarbha's remarkable performance has established them as a formidable force in Indian domestic cricket. *—PTI*

A THRILLING CONCLUSION

Cochin Queens crowned ASMITA Rowing League champions

HYDERABAD, 2 MARCH

In a thrilling conclusion to the inaugural ASMITA Rowing League held in Hyderabad, the Cochin Queens from Kerala emerged as the overall champions. The team secured an impressive tally of six golds, two silvers, and one bronze, dominating the medal count on Saturday.

The hosts, Hyderabad Queens, finished in a commendable second place with four golds and a bronze. A total of eight teams participated, competing across 20 events split into Under-19 and Under-23 categories. Cochin Queens excelled in the Under-23 events, triumphing in four of the five contests.

This unique rowing league is the first in India where teams are named after cities, adding an exciting dimension to the competition. Other participating teams included Chennai Ranis, Deccan Queen, Pune, Bhopal Waves Queen, Cuttack Rowing, Ludhiana Team Rowing, and Kolkata R-Oars.

PHOTO: X

Reflecting on the experience, Varsha KB, who has represented India at the Asian Games, expressed her joy, stating, "The team bonding was perfect. It's special as I won my event in coxless fours."

In the Under-23 section, Cochin Queens' Amrita Minj clinched the single sculls gold with a time of 4 minutes 15 seconds, while the women's squad dominated the coxless pairs and quadruple sculls events, further solidifying their status as the top team in the league. *—PTI*

Isco inspires Betis to upset Real Madrid

BARCELONA, 2 MARCH

Real Madrid's title ambitions took a hit on Saturday as Isco Alarcón led Real Betis to a 2-1 comeback victory at the Benito Villamarín. The former Madrid star delivered a corner that was headed in by Johnny Cardoso in the 34th minute, cancelling out Brahim Díaz's early opener for Madrid. Isco then converted a penalty in the 54th minute after Antonio Rudiger fouled Jesús Rodríguez in the area.

The defeat leaves Madrid level on points with Barcelona, who face Real Sociedad on Sunday. Atlético Madrid capitalised on Madrid's slip, moving two points clear at the top of the table following Julián Álvarez's decisive goal in a 1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao.

Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti expressed disappointment with his team's performance, noting they struggled to maintain momentum after a promising start. Kylian Mbappé returned to the starting line-up after dental issues but was substituted later in the match.

Real Betis' Spanish midfielder #22 Isco celebrates scoring his team's second goal during the Spanish league football match between Real Betis and Real Madrid PHOTO: X

Madrid now faces a crucial Champions League round-of-16 match against Atlético on Tuesday while grappling with injuries and suspensions to key players. *—PTI*

French League: PSG crushes Lille ahead of Liverpool clash

PARIS, 2 MARCH

Paris Saint-Germain warmed up for Liverpool with a 4-1 win over Lille as it consolidated its runaway French league lead.

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia watched the goals from the substitutes' bench on Saturday as PSG coach Luis Enrique rested the Georgia star ahead of Liverpool's visit in the Champions League. Paris hosts the Premier League leader for the first leg of their last 16 meeting on Wednesday.

Lille, which had been fourth ahead of the 24th round, had pushed for Saturday's game to be postponed because of its own Champions League match at Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday.

PSG showed no sympathy.

PSG moved 16 points clear of Marseille with its 10th straight win across all competitions. Marseille hosts Nantes on Sunday.

Earlier on Saturday, Nice stayed third with a 3-1 win at Saint-Etienne, and relegation-threatened Le Havre grabbed a 4-3 win at Lens thanks to a penalty from Egyptian forward Kouka in stoppage time. *—PTI*

Ronaldo eyes Asian League glory with Al-Nassr

DUBAI, 2 MARCH

Cristiano Ronaldo is poised to take a significant step towards the Asian Champions League elite title as Al-Nassr prepares to face Tehran's Esteghlal in a two-legged Round of 16 tie beginning on Monday. Since joining the Riyadh club in December 2022, Ronaldo has yet to secure a major trophy, making this match crucial for both him and the team, who aim for a place in the quarter-finals.

Despite a strong showing in the group stage, where Ronaldo scored six goals, Al-Nassr is struggling in the Saudi Pro League, currently sitting fourth after a 2-1 defeat to Al-Orubah. Coach Stefano Pioli expressed frustration over missed opportunities, stating, "We had many chances but could not score," as the team now turns its attention to the Asian Champions League.

Al-Nassr's Cristiano Ronaldo PHOTO: X

Al-Ahli, following an impressive hat trick by former Premier League player Ivan Toney, faces Qatar's Al-Rayyan.

In the eastern zone of the tournament, no previous winners are present, with Japanese teams like Yokohama F. Marinos and Kawasaki Frontale looking to make their mark. The final is scheduled to take place in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on 4 May. *—PTI*

PRAGUE MASTERS

Praggu outwits Keymer to join Aravindh

PRAGUE, 2 MARCH

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa secured his second consecutive victory by defeating Germany's Vincent Keymer, propelling him to join compatriot Aravindh Chithambaram at the top of the leaderboard with three points after the fourth round of the Prague Masters.

Aravindh faced initial challenges but managed to draw with Sam Shankland of the United States, while top seed Wei Yi of China rediscovered his form by defeating local favourite David Navara. Anish Giri from the Netherlands recorded his fourth draw of the tournament against Turkey's Gurel Ediz.

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa and Vincent Keymer of Germany before the start of their game at Prague Masters PHOTO: X / @PRAGUECHESS

In another match, Czech GM Nguyen Thai Dai Van drew with Quang Leim Le of Vietnam.

With Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh leading the charge, a group of players including Shankland, Keymer, Giri, and Le are positioned a point behind. The situation appears to favour the two Indian players as they head into five more rounds of competition.

Just weeks earlier, Keymer had bested Praggnanandhaa in the Tata Steel Masters, but the young Indian avenged his earlier defeat, employing a resilient strategy in the French defence. Keymer faltered in the middlegame, ultimately succumbing after Praggnanandhaa's effective counterattack which won him crucial pawns.

In Aravindh's game, Shankland equalised with relative ease, leading them to a theoretical drawn endgame despite Shankland possessing an extra pawn. *—PTI*

Sebastian Coe supports India's bid for 2036 Olympics

NEW DELHI, 2 MARCH

Sebastian Coe, potential successor to Thomas Bach as president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), has praised India's bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games, declaring it a "strong case" despite stiff competition from several other nations.

India has taken a significant step by submitting a 'Letter of Intent' to the IOC's Future Host Commission.

In an exclusive interview, Coe acknowledged India's commitment to the Olympic movement and noted the challenge posed by other bidders, including Poland, Indonesia, South Africa, and Qatar. He advised India to continue its Olympic aspirations, even if the 2036 hosting rights elude them, citing past examples of cities that lost bids yet succeeded later.

Coe highlighted the growing significance of South Asia in athletics and sports, implying that the region could significantly contribute to the Olympic movement by engaging more youth in sports. He emphasised the need for tailored development programmes across diverse Asian nations, advocating for sport as a catalyst for health and social cohesion. *—PTI*